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Kunapipi 30 (2) 2008 Full Version

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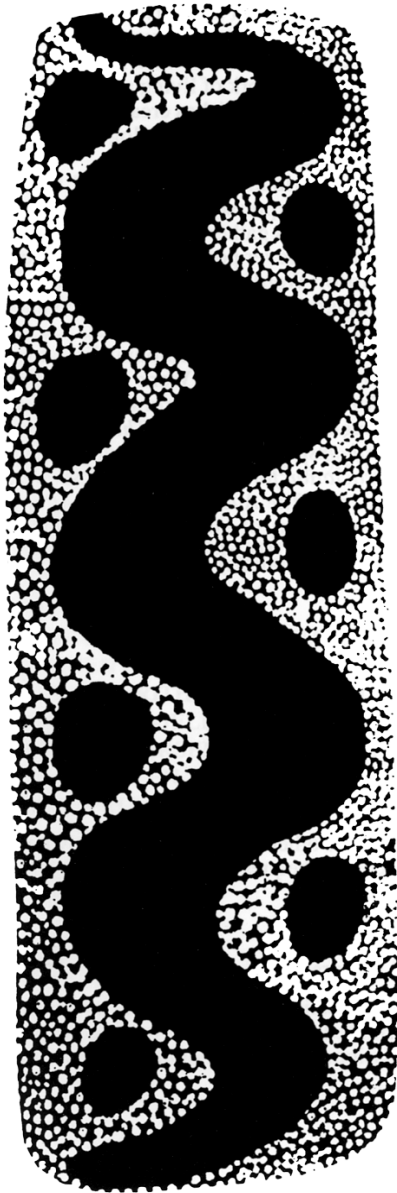
Kunapipi 30 (2) 2008 Full Version

Abstract

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KUNAPIPI

Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture



VOLUME XXX NUMBER 2
2008

Kunapipi is a biannual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. The editorial board does not necessarily endorse any political views expressed by its contributors. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with notes gathered at the end, and should conform to the Harvard (author-date) system. Submission should be in the form of a Word or Rich Text Format file sent by email attachment to acollett@uow.edu.au. Image files should be high resolution tif format and submitted on compact disc if larger than 1mb. Please include a short biography, address and email contact.

Kunapipi is an internationally refereed journal of postcolonial literature formally acknowledged by the Australian National Library. All articles are double-blind peer reviewed. Work published in *Kunapipi* is cited in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature's Annual Bibliography* (UK), *The Year's Work in English Studies* (UK), *The Grahamstown Information Journal* (SA), *Australian Literary Studies*, *The Indian Association for Commonwealth Studies* (India), *The New Straits Times* (Indonesia), *The Australian Public Affairs Information Service* (produced by the National Library of Australia) and the *MLA*.

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Kunapipi

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European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

Front Cover:

‘Wall hanging of black velour showing a map of the island of St. Vincent’, from ‘The “West Indian” Front Room’ exhibition by Michael McMillan (Geffrye Museum 2005–06). Photo © Dave Lewis.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.

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EDITORIAL

Although this special issue began with the idea of exploring the diaspora of African popular culture, it shifted over the extended period of its compilation to include work on African diaspora and/or African popular culture. The end result is an eclectic range of essays, fiction, poetry and installation work on Africa in the Caribbean, Canada, Britain, the US and Australia. It includes discussion of religion, philosophy, theatre, dub poetry, 'market literature', drumming, and home decoration. It features work on writer/performers J.M. Coetzee, Pamela Mordecai, Mukoma wa Ngugi, Moqapi Selassie, Sistren; and *Kunapipi*'s second 'poetry retrospective' that highlights the work of Caribbean storyteller, Olive Senior. I say, Caribbean, but she spends much of her life in Canada; yet when I tried to replace Caribbean with Canadian-Caribbean or Caribbean-Canadian, it did not seem right — perhaps because her poetry is situated so firmly in the rhythms of the Caribbean — its voices, its language, its stories and songs, its people and its history. 'So far from the sea,' she writes, 'I find myself/ worldless. (Oh, leave it alone, but I meant/ to write "wordless.")'. It's hard to imagine the Olive I know from her poetry and story 'short of a word', but in sympathy I give her the last word of this brief introduction and celebration of thirty years good sailing:

... sometimes, like

tonight, I feel a hemispheric sadness: the
New World as tired as the rest. And there's
a waterlogged moon getting ready to burst

like the gourd that spilled an ocean when
the seeker, like myself, disobeyed, took it
down from where it hung by a thread,

dropped and broke it. So who were we
to know that from it seas would stream
forth, bringing three ships with our eclipse:

the Black Sun? Yet how but by disobedience
can we change the world order? So what if
all we are left with is a sieve to carry water?

We can use it to fish up a poem or two
to sail from our flagpoles.¹

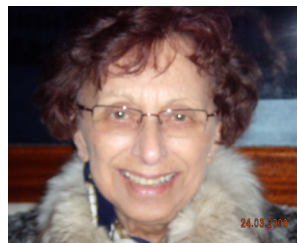
Anne Collett

NOTES

- ¹ Founded in 1979 by Anna Rutherford, this is *Kunapipi*'s 30th year of production. The lines are from 'The Song That it Sings', published in Olive Senior's latest volume of poetry, *Shell* (Toronto, Insomniac Press, 2007, p. 28). The poem is reproduced in full on p. 191 of this issue.

Memorial Tribute to Héna Maes Jelinek

Héna Maes Jelinek died on July 8, 2008. With her death one of the founding mothers of the study of Commonwealth Literature and, later, Postcolonial studies in Europe left us. I write this obituary both as a fellow academic in the field of Postcolonial studies and as a friend.



Thinking about H éna's path into prominence in the new and grossly undervalued study of Commonwealth Literature is thinking in terms of world history. What could make a fiercely intellectual, ambitious and successful woman in Belgium, who was well established in the academic world, choose to throw her considerable energy and intellect into such an underrated, non-established and academically despised field as 'Commonwealth Literature'? There are of course, a multitude of answers to such a question, but I will take my starting point in a casual remark a friend of mine, Leigh Dale, once made in the course of a conversation. She maintained that no matter what idea you might get into your head to research and write about, in the end it was always about yourself — or words to that effect. H éna was born to Jewish parents who emigrated from the former Czechoslovakia to Belgium just before the Second World War, and she survived the War hidden away in a Catholic boarding school run by nuns, together with her cousin and younger sister. Most of her widespread family died in the Holocaust. After the war, her main wish was to leave Europe as far behind as possible, and when she was offered a Mormon scholarship to study in Salt Lake City she took it; but after a year in America she was called back by her sister's illness, and while looking after her she met her future husband who was firmly rooted in Walloon society, so she stayed and started her career at the university of Liège.

Academic success and a good position in Liège society might for some have sufficed as a vindication of self-esteem and national rights, but H éna looked further than herself. After a thesis on *Criticism of Society in the English Novel between the Wars* she was drawn to the field of Commonwealth Studies which, during the sixties, was in the process of defining and establishing itself as an oppositional discourse by giving space to the marginalised voices from the former colonies. This was a somewhat tentative beginning of listening to the expressions of hurt and anger from the formerly colonised people and of accepting and then fighting for their rights to express those feelings, and it also demanded an acceptance of the justice of that anger. However tentative this beginning may have been, by aligning yourself with this group you were demanding an acknowledgement of grievous wrongs done in the not-so-distant past to millions of people by the main

powers of Western civilisation. Like her close friend, Anna Rutherford, who had the wrongs done to the Catholics throughout Australian history in her baggage, Héna threw her considerable energy into the righting of wrongs on an even larger scale than her own, and into looking for a new and different way of perceiving the world. She writes that she remembers ‘a sense of excitement at discovering ... new ways of perceiving other worlds’, and this awakened in her an enthusiasm for ‘original poets and novelists ... who were bringing a new authenticity — their authenticity — to literature’ (*A Talent(ed) Digger* xv).

Héna’s search for new and alternative ways of looking at the world found a perfect outlet in her engagement with the mystical and difficult writing of the West Indian writer and philosopher Wilson Harris. In his writing she found the perfect combination of intellectual challenge and intuitive search for a vision of ‘a dialectic process of renewal’ (Héna) which can only be achieved through a ‘capacity to digest and liberate contrasting spaces’ (Wilson Harris), and in the conclusion to an early article about *Palace of the Peacock*, in *Enigma of Values* Héna states that ‘a sense of humility and compassion towards oneself and others ... is tentatively aimed at counteracting one’s “fear of strangeness and catastrophe in a destitute world”’ (106). Through several books Héna became *the authority* on the writing of Wilson Harris.

Héna was also extremely hard working, and this resulted in — apart from the Wilson Harris books — a large number of articles about a variety of authors and subjects within the fast expanding field of what became Postcolonial Studies. Héna was one of the editors of the Cross/Cultures series ‘Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English’ published by Rodopi, the firm that she had helped set up together with Geoffrey Davis and Gordon Collier, and she was one of the founder members of our association and has been chairperson of European ACLALS for two terms.

Ironically, Héna was given an OBE by the British government for her contribution to the knowledge of English language literature, and both ironically and understandably, she loved it.

Behind her drive and all the achievements, Héna was a very special friend to have. She was a demanding friend, you could lose her friendship, as I did for a while, but you could also regain it. In her own life, she had the capacity for renewal and change, which she explored and advocated in her academic work. To be with, she was hospitable, kind, a great cook, an art lover, intellectually demanding, a power shopper and the most courageous survivor against all odds I have ever met. I have stayed with her, travelled with her, quarrelled with her, admired her and come to love her dearly, and now to miss her badly.

Kirsten Holst Petersen

Olive Senior

COLONIAL GIRLS SCHOOL *For Marlene Smith MacLeish*

Borrowed images
 willed our skins pale
 muffled our laughter
 lowered our voices
 let out our hems
 dekinked our hair
 denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers
 harnessed our voices to madrigals
 and genteel airs
 yoked our minds to declensions in Latin
 and the language of Shakespeare

Told us nothing about ourselves
 There was nothing about us at all

How those pale northern eyes and
 aristocratic whispers once erased us
 How our loudness, our laughter
 debased us

There was nothing left of ourselves
 Nothing about us at all

Studying: *History Ancient and Modern*
 Kings and Queens of England
 Steppes of Russia
 Wheatfields of Canada

There was nothing of our landscape there
 Nothing about us at all

Marcus Garvey turned twice in his grave.
 ‘Thirty-eight was a beacon. A flame.
 They were talking of desegregation
 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Lumumba
 and the Congo. To us mumbo-jumbo.
We had read Vachel Lindsay’s
 vision of the jungle

Feeling nothing about ourselves
There was nothing about us at all

Months, years, a childhood memorising
Latin declensions
(For our language
— ‘bad talking’ —
detentions)

Finding nothing about us there
There was nothing about us at all

So, friend of my childhood years
One day we’ll talk about
How the mirror broke
Who kissed us awake
Who let Anansi from his bag

For isn’t it strange how
northern eyes
in the brighter world before us now

Pale?

(from *Talking of Trees*, Mona, Kingston: Calabash, 1985, pp. 26–27)

ROBERTO STRONGMAN

The Afro-Diasporic Body in Haitian Vodou and the Transcending of Gendered Cartesian Corporeality

As a social construct, the body is pieced together differently in every cultural context. The discourse of embodiment in the Western philosophical tradition contrasts sharply with the more modular conceptualisation of the body found in Afro-Diasporic religious cultures. An explication of some canonical texts of Western philosophy and some filmic and literary texts from Haiti can demonstrate how these contrasting understandings of the body produce unique gendered and sexual categories of being.

The Western philosophical tradition presents the concept of a unitary soul within the hermetic enclosure of a body. In *Sources of the Self*, the *Historian of Philosophy*, Charles Taylor, presents a genealogy of the Western self in which Descartes marks the most important milestone. He writes,

The internalization wrought by the modern age, of which Descartes' formulation was one of the most important and influential, is very different from Augustine's. It does, in a very real sense, place the moral sources within us. Relative to Plato, and relative to Augustine, it brings about in each case a transposition by which we no longer see ourselves as related to moral sources outside us, or at least not at all in the same way. An important power has been internalized. (143)

It is important to place Taylor's claims concerning Descartes in the historical context of the Enlightenment. The theocentric philosophical tradition delineated by Plato and Augustine is characterised by man's search for an identity that lies beyond himself, in the Divine without. The intense secularisation of the Enlightenment disrupts this theocentrism by foregrounding the individual, a move that brings about the internalisation of identity. This sense of inwardness, however, is dependent upon a clear demarcation between the new boundaries of the self and the body. In the following passage, Descartes reasons how even if the mind or soul might be within the body, the two remain distinct parts of the individual:

In order to begin this examination, then, I here say, in the first place, that there is a great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible. For, as a matter of fact, when I consider the mind, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire; and although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot, or an arm, or some other

part, is separated from my body, I am aware that nothing has been taken away from my mind. And the faculties of willing, feeling, conceiving, etc. cannot be properly speaking said to be its parts, for it is one and the same mind which employs itself in willing and in feeling and understanding. But it is quite otherwise with corporeal or extended objects, for there is not one of these imaginable by me which my mind cannot easily divide into parts and which consequently I do not recognize as being divisible; this would be sufficient to teach me that the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources. (105–106)

Clearly, Descartes' concern here is to negate the full absorption of the soul by the body in the process of subjective internalisation. The two remain distinct entities, even if one resides within the other. Apart from remarking on Descartes' famous *Cogito* in his description of the 'I' as the 'thinking thing', his concern for divisibility and indivisibility as tests for integrity should be noted. Descartes believes that the possibility of the body to be separated into parts implies that it is of a different nature than the indivisible mind/soul. In fact, Western philosophy will not be able to develop a discourse for the parts of the mind until the twentieth century with Freud's 'The Ego and the Id' and most importantly with Sartre's *L'être et le néant*, a text that claims that 'L'altérité est, en effet, une négation interne et seule une conscience peut se constituer comme négation interne' [Alterity is, really, an internal negation and only a conscience can constitute itself as an internal negation] (666)¹. Nevertheless, through his reasoning, Descartes crystallises the notion of a self within a body, establishing this self as internal, unitary and inseparable from the body.

In the twentieth century, a strong Western philosophical current attempts to amend the internal subject of Descartes'. Bataille, for example, posits the divine as self inside the body: 'J'entends par *expérience intérieure* ce que d'habitude on nomme *expérience mystique* : les états d'extase, de ravissement, au moins d'émotion méditée' [By *internal experience* I mean that which normally is called *mystical experience*: ecstasies, rapture, as a form of mediating emotion] (15). Bataille here suggests that even though Inwardness initially required secularisation, once it is established it can become sacramental again without forcing the self to exit the body. Similarly, Michel Serres in *Variations sur le Corps* uses an aesthetic discourse to claim that the body's internalisation of the self does not imply a rejection of the profound and transcendental mystery of artistic appreciation:

Voilà les cycles admirables de support réciproque entre le labyrinthe de l'oreille interne, chargé du port, et les volutes spiralées de l'externe, qui entend et produit la musique, convergeant dans un centre noir et secret, commun à ses deux réseaux, où je découvre soudain la solution aux mystères sombres de l'union de l'âme qui ouït la langue et du corps porteur.

[Let's consider the admirable cycles of reciprocal support between the labyrinth of the internal ear and the spiralling corrugations of the external ear, which hears and produces music, converging into one dark and secret centre, common to both networks,

where I suddenly discover the solution to the shadowy mysteries of the union between the soul that hears language and the body which carries it.] (Serres 23)

While Bataille and Serres are interested in recuperating the Divine for the internal self, for Sartre '[t]out autre conception de l'altérité reviendrait à la poser comme en-soi, c'est-à-dire à établir entre elle et l'être une relation externe, ce qui nécessiterait la présence d'un témoin pour constater que l'autre est autre que l'en-soi'. [All other conceptualisation of alterity will end up presenting it as in-itself, in other words, to establish between it and Being an external relationship, which would require the presence of a witness to verify that the other is different from that which is in-itself] (666).

Recent scientific experiments in the area of perception and cognition present further evidence that the relationship between the self and the body is not a universal given, but imagined and constructed. Out-of-body experiments conducted by two research groups using slightly different methods expanded upon the 'rubber hand illusion'. In that illusion, people hide one hand in their lap and look at the rubber hand set on a table in front of them. As a researcher strokes the real hand and the rubber at the same time with a stick, people have the sensation that the rubber hand is their own. When a hammer hits the rubber hand, the subjects recoil or cringe. Two different research teams lead by Henrik Ehrsson, and Bigna Lenggenhager respectively, created whole-body illusions with similar manipulations, this time through the use of virtual-reality technology. The subjects wore goggles connected to two video cameras placed six feet behind them and, as a result, saw their own backs from the perspective of a virtual person located behind them. When the researcher stroked the subject's chest and moved the second stick under the camera lenses simultaneously, the subjects reported the sense of being outside of their own bodies, looking at themselves from a distance where the cameras were located. The scientists infer from these experiments that they now understand how the brain combines visual and tactile information to compute and determine where the self is located in space. These experiments are relevant in that they demonstrate that the location of the self vis-à-vis the body can and is culturally constructed through the senses. The body and its self need not be coterminous. The self need not reside inside the body, but may be imagined or placed externally. In different ways, current scientific discourse coincides with Afro-Diasporic philosophy in their exposure of subjective inwardness as an illusion.

In *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, Paget Henry explains that Afro-Diasporic philosophy does not exist as a tradition isolated from other manifestations of culture:

Because traditional African philosophy emerged implicitly in the ontological, ethical, existential, and other positions taken in religious, mythic, genealogical, and folkloric discourses, its presence and visibility depended upon the continued vitality and growth of these systems of thought. Their contraction or decay would mean decline and

eclipse for traditional African philosophy. ... In the Caribbean ... traditional African philosophy experienced an even greater eclipse as a result of the rise of colonial discourses and a literate, hybridized local intelligentsia. (Henry 2000 43–45)

Henry's statement implies the need to investigate Afro-Diasporic religion as a repository of philosophical information that can overcome the imposition of Western philosophical discourses on colonised peoples. In fact, a thorough study of Afro-Diasporic religions reveals how — unlike the Western idea of the fixed internal unitary soul — the Afro-Diasporic self is removable, external and multiple. In *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Kuame Gyekye presents a tripartite plan of the self comprised of the Honam — the material body; the Okra — the immaterial soul; and the Sunsum — the quasi-material spirit (89). In *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Kwasi Wiredu explains Gyekye's systematisation of Akan personhood by comparing it with Descartes' mind/body binarism:

One thing, in any case, should be absolutely clear: Neither the okra nor the sunsum can be identified with the immaterial soul familiar in some influential Western philosophical and religious thinking (with all its attendant paradoxes). This concept of the soul is routinely used interchangeably with the concept of mind while the concept of okra and sunsum are categorically different from the Akan concept of mind (adwene), as our previous explanation should have rendered apparent. Thus Descartes (in English translation) can speak indifferently of the soul or the mind and appear to make sense. In Akan to identify either the okra or the sunsum with adwene would be the sheerest gibberish. (Wiredu 129)

The multiplicity of the self displayed in the Akan scheme is prevalent in West African societies and has been noted by Haitian Vodou scholar Guérin Montilus in his study of Adja philosophy:

The Vodou religion of the Adja taught these same Africans that their psychic reality and source of human life was metaphorically symbolized by the shadow of the body. This principle, represented by the shadow, is called the *ye*. There are two of these. The first is the inner, the internal part of the shadow, which is called the *ye gli*; that is, a short *ye*. The second, the external and light part of the same shadow, is called the *ye gaga*; that is, the long *ye*. The first *ye gli*, is the principle of physical life, which vanishes at death. The second, *ye gaga*, is the principle of consciousness and psychic life. The *ye gaga* survives death and illustrates the principle of immortality. It has metaphysical mobility that allows human beings to travel far away at night (through dreams) or remain eternally alive after the banishment of the *ye gli*. After death, the *ye gaga* goes to meet the community of Ancestors, which constitutes the extended family and the clan in their spiritual dimensions. (Montilus 2)

This multiplicity of the self found in African philosophy survives in the Caribbean Diaspora. The African duality of the immaterial self — the okra and sunsum of the Akan and the *ye gli* and *ye gaga* of the Adja — become the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj* in Haitian Vodou. In *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*, Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert define these two elusive terms:

The head, which contains the two elements that comprise the soul — the *ti bònanj* or *ti bon ange* (the conscience that allows for self-reflection and self-criticism) and the *gwo bònanj* or *gros bon ange* (the psyche, source of memory, intelligence, and personhood) — must be prepared so that the *gros bon ange* can be separated from the initiate to allow the spirit to enter in its place. (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 118)

Here a co-operative relationship between the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj* might be seen. Alfred Métraux further expounds on this co-operation:

It is the general opinion that dreams are produced by the wanderings of the Gros-bon-ange when it abandons the body during sleep. The sleeper becomes aware of the adventures of the Gros-bon-ange through the *Ti-z'ange* who remains by him as a protector and yet never loses sight of the Gros-bon-ange. He wakes the sleeper in case of danger and even flies to the rescue of the Gros-bon-ange if this faces real danger. (Métraux 1946 85)

For the self to achieve altered states of consciousness — in trance possessions, dreams, or death — the *tibonanj* allows the *gwobonanj* to become detached from the person. In the case of trance possession, the *gwobonanj* surrenders its place and its authority to the *mèt tet*, ‘the main spirit served by that person and the one s/he most often goes into trance for’ (McCarthy Brown 2006 10). In her landmark book *Mama Lola: A Vodou priestess in Brooklyn*, Karen McCarthy Brown further explains the multiple concept of the self in Vodou by presenting the notion of the *mèt tet*, roughly translated as ‘the master of the head’:

The personality of the *mèt tet* and that of the devotee tend to coincide, an intimate tie hinted at in the occasional identification of the ‘big guardian angel’ (*gwo bònanj*), one dimension of what might be called a person’s soul, with the Vodou spirit who is his or her *mèt tet*. (McCarthy Brown 1991 112–13)

Here the *gwobonanj* is the central element of the self in Vodou. Not only is it the seat of individuality but it also maintains links between *mèt tet* and the *tibonanj*, two aspects of the self that are not directly connected to each other. These links are broken after the death of the individual, in the Vodou ceremony of *dessounin*:

In a certain sense, the *maît-tête* is the divine parent of the *gros-bon-ange*, the psychic inheritance from the parents. The ceremony of *dessounin* thus accomplishes two separate but related actions: it severs the loa cord of the *gros-bon-ange*; and it separates the *gros-bon-ange* from its physical parent — the now defunct matter of the body — launching it as an independent spiritual entity into the spiritual universe, where it, in turn, becomes either part of the general spiritual heritage of the descendants of that person, or even, perhaps, the divine parent, the loa *maît-tête* of some subsequent *gros-bon-ange*. (Deren 45)

The roles of the two most important aspects of the self may be summarised by saying that the *gwobonanj* is consciousness, while the *tibonanj* is objectivity. The *gwobonanj* is the principal soul, experience, personality (Agosto de Muñoz), the personal soul or self (Deren 44). The *tibonanj* is described as the anonymous, protective, objective conscience that is the truthful and objective, the impersonal spiritual component of the individual (Deren 44), whose domain also encompasses

moral considerations and arbitration (Agosto de Muñoz 52). The *tibonanj* is a 'spiritual reserve tank. It is an energy or presence within the person that is dimmer or deeper than consciousness, but it is nevertheless there to be called upon in situations of stress and depletion' (McCarthy Brown 2006 9).

The complex relationship between the *gwobonanj* and the *tibonanj* has at times not been correctly understood by Western scholars, who have disseminated erroneous information, further muddying our collective understanding of the self in Vodou. For example, Desmangles ascribes to the *tibonanj* characteristics that most scholars attribute to the *gwobonanj*: 'the ti-bon-anj is the ego-soul. It represents the unique qualities that characterize an individual's personality' (Desmangles 67). Comparisons to Western philosophy underscore his confusion:

The Vodou concept of the ti-bon-anj in heaven seems to correspond to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the soul, for Vodouisants believe that it 'appears' before Bondye to stand before the heavenly tribunal where it is arraigned for its misdeeds, and must suffer the appropriate penalties. (Desmangles 69)

Similarly, Wade Davis ascribes to the *tibonanj*, attributes that most scholars use to define the *gwobonanj*: 'the Ti bon ange [is] the individual, aura, the source of all personality and willpower' (Davis 1986 185). Furthermore, Davis says that the *tibonanj* travels during sleep (Davis 1986 182), while most scholars agree that it is the *gwobonanj* who does so (McCarthy Brown 2006 9) (Montilus 2006 4).

In addition to the *gwobonanj*, *tibonanj* and the *mèt tet*, there remain three components of the Vodou concept of personhood. The *nam* is the 'spirit of the flesh that allows each cell to function' (Davis 1986 185) or 'the animating force of the body' (McCarthy Brown 2006 8). The *zetwal* is the 'celestial parallel self, fate' (McCarthy Brown 2006 9) and the 'spiritual component that resides in the sky'; it is 'the individual's star of destiny' (Davis 1986 185). The *kòr kadav* is 'the body itself, the flesh and blood' (Davis 1986 185), 'the dead body of a person' and 'a material substance separable from these various animating spiritual entities' (McCarthy Brown 2006 9).

The phenomenon of trance possession needs to be explained through the multiplicity of the self in Vodou. The projection of Western philosophical concepts by anthropologists onto Vodou has been responsible for inaccurate understandings of trance possession. 'The symptoms of the opening phase of the trance are clearly pathological. They conform exactly in their main features, to the stock clinical conception of hysteria' (Métraux 1959 120). Nevertheless, it is important to note how other scholars from the Haitian national elite have questioned the uses of Western philosophy to understand Afro-Diasporic trance possession:

Quoiqu'il en soit, si le phénomène de la possession — la transe ou l'extase — chez les criseurs du Vaudou est une psycho-névrose, peut-on la classer dans la catégorie de l'hystérie selon l'une ou l'autre doctrine ci-dessus exposée? Nous ne le croyons pas.

Les possédés de la loi ne sont pas de criseurs dont on peut provoquer l'attaque par suggestion et qu'on peut guérir par persuasion.

[Even if the phenomenon of possession — trance or ecstasy — implies among Vodou practitioners a psychological breakdown, can one classify it within the category of hysteria according to one or another doctrine here presented? We do not believe this to be a correct approach. Those possessed by lwa are not psychotics who can be induced into such a state by the power of suggestion or healed through persuasion.]

(Mars 1928 128)

However, even as Métraux inaccurately equates trance possession with the already questionable notion of 'hysteria', he does provide one of the clearest definitions of this phenomenon during the 1950s, the early period of serious scholarly investigation on Vodou:

The explanation of mystic trance given by disciples of Voodoo is simple: a *loa* moves into the head of an individual having first driven out 'the good big angel' (*gros bon ange*) — one of the two souls everyone carries in himself. This eviction of the soul is responsible for the tremblings and convulsions that characterize the opening stages of trance. Once the good angel has gone the person possessed experiences a feeling of total emptiness as though he were fainting. His head whirls, the calves of his legs tremble; he now becomes not only the vessel but also the instrument of the god. From now on it is the god's personality and not his own which is expressed in his bearing and words. The play of these features, his gestures and even the tone of his voice all reflect the temperament and character of the god who has descended upon him.

(Métraux 1959 120)

Métraux' work helps to locate the seat of selfhood in the corporeal head of the individual. In Haitian Kreyòl, *tèt* has an interesting double meaning. It is a noun referring to the anatomical 'head' and, in its function as a reflexive prefix attached to personal pronouns, it also means 'self'. This synecdoche becomes important as it establishes the head as a referent for selfhood. It also presents the head as the physical location for the multiple parts of the self. Writing in the interstices between African and European philosophies, Métraux describes trance possession using an ambiguous language implying penetration and hovering. This vacillation between metaphors for possession continues in the following passage:

The relationship between the *loa* and the man seized is compared to that which joins a rider to his horse. That is why a *loa* is spoken of as mounting or saddling his *chual* (horse)... It is also an invasion of the body by a supernatural spirit; hence the often-used expression: 'the *loa* is seizing his horse'. (Métraux 1959 120)

Métraux's use of in/out metaphors for the phenomenon of possession is a Western importation. The rider metaphor popularised by early scholars of Vodou, like Zora Neale Hurston (*Tell my Horse* [1938]) and Katherine Dunham (*Island Possessed* [1969]), articulates the language used by the initiates themselves.

Afro-Diasporic religions operate under a transcorporeal conceptualisation of the self that is radically different from the Western philosophical tradition. Unlike the unitary soul of Descartes', the immaterial aspect of the Afro-Diasporic

self is multiple, external and removable. These various subjectivities rest upon a concave corporeal surface reminiscent of a saddle or a calabash.

What are the possible implications for gender in a modular system in which the self can be substituted temporarily by a subjectivity of another gender? Some of these gender implications of Afro-Diasporic transcorporeality are evident in Rene Depestre's novel, *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*. In this narrative, Hadriana — a white French woman living in Haiti — is turned into a zombie on her wedding day and becomes the leader of a Vodou community. Martin Munro sees in Hadriana's whiteness 'obvious traces of Depestre's francophilia' (Munro 2007 127), but he also concedes that there might be an element of resistance in Depestre's idealisation of Hadriana's beauty by claiming that she might embody a 'reversal of colonial eroticization of its tropical other' (Munro 127). Her aborted marriage begins a non-heteronormative characterisation of Hadriana that continues throughout her spiritual evolution. At the outset of the text Hadriana is associated with Nana Buruku, a lwa that is often represented as embodying a primordial androgynous gender.

Incapables d'admettre l'arrêt du cœur qui a terrassé Nana au pied de l'autel, des Jacméliens à l'imagination nécrophile ont réincorporé leur fille à un conte des fées. La disparition de son corps du sépulcre était l'épisode qui menait à son terme ce saut dans un imaginaire aux prises avec la peur de la mort.

[The people of Jacmel, unable to accept that a heart attack brought Nana down to the foot of the altar, used their necrophiliac imagination to reinsert their daughter into a fairy tale. Her body's disappearance from the sepulchre was the catalyst for such a leap from the fear of death into fantasy.] (Depestre 99)

At the end of the novel, she is associated with a male deity of springs: 'J'étais Simbi-la-Source. Les dieux de vaudou m'auraient chargée de convoyer à la Jamaïque une poignée d'émigrants de la région de Jacmel.' [I was Simbi-the-Spring. The gods of Vodou ordered me to take a handful of emigrants from Jacmel to Jamaica.] (Depestre 207). The re-gendering seen in Hadriana's transmutation into various deities is also evident in the powerful trance a *Mambo* experiences at another point in the text: 'Dès les premières mesures de danse, saint Jacques le Majeur, chef de la famille des Ogou, monta le cheval Brévica Losange. Aussitôt possédée, la Mambo improvisa une chanson en harmonie avec les batteries' [From the first notes of the dance, Saint James the Greater — the first in the family of the Oguns — mounts Brévica Losange as his horse. In that manner possessed, the Mambo improvises a song in harmony with the drums] (Depestre 77). This female Vodou priestess' identification with one of the most virile of lwas demonstrates how the substitution of the *gwobonanj* by the *mèt tet* of another gender can have as a result the Vodouisant's corporeal re-gendering.

In addition to her association with Nana Buruku and Simbi-la-Source, Hadriana is constantly associated with yet another lwa: Gédé, whose domain is life and death. Although his demeanour is humorous, he is known for speaking

harsh truths. His portrayal as an undertaker is enhanced by his top hat. His eyeglasses have only one lens, implying vision in this world and the next. His walking cane is a phallus, which acquires a transcorporeal aspect in the hands of his female devotees. Hadriana's death is presented as the responsibility of this Iwa: 'Un homme à l'allure de Baron-Samedi invita des guédés présents à ses côtés à prendre le cercueil des mains apostoliques qui le portaient' [A man with a resemblance to Baron-Samedi invites those Gédés at his side to take the casket from the apostolic hands that carry it] (Depestre 92). Hadriana's inert body becomes the very representation of death, and therefore that of Gédé:

A vingt mètres environ du catafalque, les musiciens, dans un accord parfait, imposèrent à la fièvre générale un casse-tambour: la foule s'arrêta de danser pour mimer la raideur cadavérique d'Hadriana Siloé, faisant de la place un canton du royaume des morts.

[Twenty metres around the spectacle, the musicians, in unison, impose the general fever of the drum: the crowd stops dancing to mimic the corpse-like ugliness of Hadriana Siloé, making the square a settlement of death's kingdom.] (Depestre 68)

Hadriana's identification with this highly sexual mortuary deity is evident in a description of a Vodou ceremony that foregrounds Gédé's transgression of the binarisms of death/life, masculinity/femininity, terrestrial/celestial, sacred/profane:

Au contraire, tambours, vaccines, instruments à vent changèrent la chanson de Madame Losange en saison ensoleillée de la nuit: leur furie musicale fit alterner en chaque vivant mort et naissance, râles de'agonie et cris triomphants de l'orgasme. Le volcan musical réduisit en cendres les obstacles légendaires entre Thanatos et Éros, au-delà des interdits jetés entre les spermatozoïdes des mâles noirs et les ovules des femelles blanches. L'explosion des guédés, vivifiée par le sang chaud, mit les âmes et les corps, verges et vagins éblouis, en harmonie cosmique avec l'espoir fou d'arracher Nana Siloé à la mort et d'allumer de nouveau l'étoile de sa chair dans notre vie.

[On the contrary, drums and wind instruments change Madame Losange's song into a sunny season of the night: their musical fury alternates in each of the living death and birth, cries of agony and exclamations of orgasmic triumph. The musical volcano reduced to ashes the legendary obstacles between Thanatos and Eros, beyond the prohibitions against the sperm of black males and the eggs of white females. The explosion of Gédés, enlivened by the warm blood, puts the souls and the bodies, the tumescent penises and the vaginas, in cosmic harmony with the crazy hope of rescuing Nana Siloé from death and light again, among us, the star of her life in her flesh.]

(Depestre 79)

The transcorporeality found in the religious tradition of Vodou enables the assumption of cross-gender subjectivities in the secular arena. Depestre makes use of irony not only by having Hadriana's death take place at the wedding altar, but also by having the wake take place during carnival. Troupes of revellers parade by Hadriana's dead body. The contrast between feast and funeral highlights a reversal of gender norms in the Caribbean carnival tradition of the *mariage burlesque*:

Je m'arrêtai d'abord devant un groupe d'hommes déguisés en femmes. Pour simuler un état de grossesse avancée, ils avaient placé sous leurs robes de satin vert des oreillers

et des coussins. Ils avaient des poitrines et des fesses de vénus callipyges. En appui sur des gourdins, les travestis bavardaient avec des personnages enveloppés dans des draps blancs.

[I stopped in front of a group of men disguised as women. In order to simulate an advanced state of pregnancy, they placed pillows under their satin dresses. They had breasts and buttocks fit for Venus Kallipygos. Supported by staffs, the cross-dressers chatted with people dressed in white clothes.] (Depestre 59–60)

Edouard Glissant presents this tradition as one of the few places in which West Indian society is able to critique patriarchal heteronormativity:

Il est une occasion en Martinique où hommes et femmes se rencontrent d'accord pour donner une semblable représentation de leurs rapports: c'est dans la coutume des mariages burlesques du Carnaval, critique de la structure familiale. L'homme y tient le rôle de l'épouse (le plus souvent enceinte) et la femme celui de l'époux; un adulte y tient le rôle d'un enfant au berceau ...

Il n'est pas surprenant que le mariage burlesque soit une des rares formes encore vivaces de ce grand questionnement populaire et collectif qu'était et que ne peut plus être le carnaval martiniquais.

[There is an occasion in Martinique in which men and women meet in order to give a symbolic representation of their relationship. This is the tradition of the burlesque marriages during carnival, a critique of family structure. The man has the role of the wife (often pregnant) and the woman that of the husband; an adult has the role of an infant in a crib. It is not surprising that the burlesque marriage is one of the rare forms still alive of that great popular and collective questioning that can be none other than the Martinican carnival.] (Glissant 299)

Glissant's Martinican context prevents him from considering Haitian Vodou as yet another site in which West Indian societies are able to question the dictates of gender and sexual norms. However, this Martinican perspective enables us to consider the ways in which this transcorporeality extends beyond the religious and permeates the entire structure of West Indian society, even of those that have been greatly Europeanised as a result of departmentalisation.

That the representations of West Indian society in Depestre are suffused with exoticism has not passed unnoticed by literary critics. In an effort to redeem Depestre's work, Martin Munro reminds us 'Exoticism is not, not always, a product of the hegemonic gaze. The processes of mass exile from the Caribbean have rendered the dualistic centre-periphery concept of hegemony ever more redundant' (Munro 2007 134). In other words, Depestre's exoticism may be read as stemming from a deep nostalgia and as a catharsis for the loss and separation from his native Haiti as a result of his exile in France.

Unlike the Western idea of the body as the enclosure of the soul, the *kòr kadav* is an open vessel that finds metaphoric and aesthetic expression in the *Kwi*, *govi*, and *kanari* containers of Haitian Vodou. As Thompson explains, one of the most arresting sights for a newcomer into an Afro-Diasporic religious setting is the collection and assortment of ritual containers:

The close gathering of numerous bottles and containers, on various tiers, is a strong organizing principle in the world of vodun altars. That unifying concept, binding Haitian Rada altars to Dahomean altars in West Africa, precisely entails a constant elevation of a profusion of pottery upon a dais, an emphasis on simultaneous assuagement (the liquid in vessels) and exaltation (the ascending structure of the tiers).

(Thompson 182)

In fact, some of the most striking art objects of the African Diaspora are anthropomorphic receptacles, as noted by Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau, in his art exhibit book, *Réceptacles*: 'Les Kuba et les peuples apparentés du Zaïre ont privilégié de façon presque systématique, mais avec raffinement, la représentation de la tête dans la conception des plus beaux de leurs réceptacles: le coupes à boire le vin de palme' [The Kuba and their kin in Zaire have privileged in an almost codified, yet refined, manner the representation of the head in crafting the most beautiful of their receptacles: the cups for drinking palm wine.] (Falgayrettes-Leveau 32). These cephalomorphic receptacles emblemise the function of the head — and through synecdoche, the body — as an open container. This association of the head with such ritual containers is evident in the use of a specific receptacle called *pò tets*, literally 'container heads':

This part of the initiation also involves the preparation of the *pò tets*, as containers for the new selves, repositories for ingredients symbolic of the new union of spirit and human being: hair, sacrificial food, herbs, and oils. When the initiates join the community for their presentation as ounsins, they walk with these pots balanced on their heads and place them in the altar, as symbol of their entering the community as initiated ounsi. (Fernandez Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 118–19).

This representation of the head as an open vessel becomes evident in the association between the material body and various types of ritual containers in Depestre's *Hadriana*:

J'étais saisie de violentes convulsions internes. Tous mes os vibraient à se rompre. J'ai sombré dans un cauchemar à l'intérieur de mon cauchemar. J'étais un âme volée. On a séparé mon petit bon ange de mon gros bon ange. On a enfermé le premier dans une calebasse pour l'emmener à dos de mule dans un pénitencier d'âmes dans la montagne du Haut-Cap-Rouge. Le second, le bras liés derrière les dos, a été poussé à coups de fouet comme un âne, dans une direction opposée. Tout lien a été rompu entre mes deux formes d'être.

[I was overcome by violent internal convulsions. All my bones vibrated until they almost cracked. I was in a nightmare inside a nightmare. I was a stolen soul. They separated my *tibonanj* from my *gwobonanj*. They had enclosed the first in a calabash to take it by mule back to a penitentiary of souls in the mountains of Haut-Cap-Rouge. The second, arm tied behind his back, was flagellated like an ass in the opposite direction. All links were broken between my two forms of being.] (Depestre 175)

Here it is possible to see Depestre's important depiction of the African multiple self. This section demonstrates the ways in which aspects of the self might be removable without producing the individual's death. It is also significant how

Depestre presents the calabash as one of the receptacles that may be used as substitute for the human body.

Davis explains how the separation of the corporeal and immaterial aspects of the self that Depestre describes constitute the phenomenon of zombification:

The spirit zombi, or the zombie of the *ti bon ange* alone, is carefully stored in a jar and may later be magically transmuted into insects, animals, or humans in order to accomplish the particular work of the *bokòr*. The remaining spiritual components of man, the *n'âme*, the *gros bon ange*, and the *z'étoile*, together form the zombi cadaver, the zombi of the flesh. (Davis 1986 186)

This very detached description of the process of zombification is consistent with Davis' clinical view of zombification as purely the result of neurotoxin poisoning (Davis 1988 7). However, for Depestre, zombification has much more emotive connotations associated with loss of autonomy and spiritual imprisonment:

Ce lieu de détention a été aménagé pour recevoir les âmes embouteillées des chrétiens-vivants condamnés à une peine privative de liberté spirituelle. Le régime cellulaire consiste à mettre en bouteilles l'imaginaire des individus changés en mortes-vivants. Les bouteilles que vous allez voir sont des oubliettes en verre, cristal, métal, faïence, cuir, bois, grès!

[This place of detention was prepared to receive the bottled up souls of people condemned to a privation of their spiritual liberty. The practice consisted in bottling up the imaginary of individuals who have become living dead. The bottles that you will see are little forgotten things in glass, crystal, metal, ceramic, leather, wood, and stoneware!] (Depestre 175)

It may be argued then, that Depestre, like Davis, conceives the *tibonanj* as the principal soul and the seat of individuality. However, this view is incongruent with the work of other scholars, who believe that '[t]he famous zombies are people whose Gros-bon-ange has been captured by some evil *hungan*, thus becoming living-dead' (Métraux 1946 87). Moreover, apart from zombification, there are various forms of spiritual embottlement, all of which involve the capturing of the *gwobonanj*, not the *tibonanj*. For instance, when the individual willingly decides to bottle up part of his or her self, it is the *gwobonanj*:

A certain amount of immunity against witchcraft may be obtained by requesting an *hungan* to extract the Gros-bon-ange from the body and to enclose it in a bottle. The soul, removed from its bodily envelope, may either be hidden or buried in a garden or entrusted to the *hungan* for safekeeping. (Métraux 1946 86)

While this procedure protects the *gwobonanj*, it does not prevent damage to the material body from which it proceeds. This creates a potentially dangerous scenario in which people who have sustained severe bodily injury — either through spells or accidents — will beg to have their *gwobonanj* liberated from the bottle, in order to end their corporeal suffering through death.

The *gwobonanj* must be ritually removed from the person's head shortly after death through the ceremony of *desounnen*, in which

The Oungan calls the spirit, or in some cases the name of the dead, then removes the lwa and puts it in a pitcher or bottle, called a *govi*. In death, the link between the spirit and its human vessel must be broken, so that the individual's spirit can move beyond death, and beyond revenge, joining the ancestors under the waters in the mythical place called Ginen (Guinea). (Dayan 261)

Then, a year and day after death, the *gwobonanj* is called up from the water in a ceremony referred to as *rele mò nan dlo* [calling the dead from the water] and installed in a *govi* clay pot (McCarthy Brown 2006 8).

Depestre and Davis are correct in their assessment of zombification as constituting the embottlement of one part of the self. However, they are mistaken in saying that this part is the *tibonanj*, since this and other types of spiritual embottlements involve the containment of the *gwobonanj*. Beyond noticing these important discrepancies, what is important for us here is to consider how, regardless of what aspect of the self is bottled, according to all of these authors any type of hermetic enclosing of the self is seen as potentially dangerous or associated with death. The fact that one of the most dreaded Afro-Diasporic states of being should be so similar to the Cartesian view of the hermetically sealed soul points to the contestatory and critical relationship between these two philosophical traditions. Curiously, the zombified body of Haitian Vodou bears striking similarities to the body without organs that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari elaborate in *L'Anti-Œdipe*:

Instinct de mort, tel est son nom. Car le désir désire *aussi* cela, la mort, parce que le corps plein de la mort est son moteur immobile, parce que les organes de la vie sont la *working machine* ... Le corps sans organes n'est pas le témoin d'un néant originel, pas plus que le reste d'une totalité perdue. Il n'est surtout pas une projection; rien à voir avec le corps propre, ou avec un image du corps. C'est le corps sans image. Lui, l'improductif ... Le corps sans organes est de l'anti-production.

[Death instinct, that is his name. Since the desire desires also that death, because the body full of death is an immobile motor, because life's organs are the working machine. The body without organs is not the witness of an original nothingness, not any more than the remains of a lost totality. It is not a projection; it has nothing to do with the body itself or the image of the body. It is the body without an image. Him, the unproductive ... the body without organs is anti-production.] (Deleuze 1972 15)

In this sense, both the Western and African views of personhood can be seen to coincide. By presenting the most abject state of being as that of the body that is deprived of its immaterial elements — organs, *gwobonanj* — both traditions present an image of the exploited, enslaved, unremunerated and incomplete worker. Descartes' body-as-clockwork and Vodou's *kòr kadav* are more similar than previously thought.

One of the *gwobonanj* kept by the bokòr is that of a same-sex-loving male artist: 'Dans le siphon d'eau de seltz est détenu un peintre macici' [There is a queer painter imprisoned in the seltzer water syphon] (Depestre 176). While Fanon insists in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* that there is no homosexuality in the

West Indies (Fanon 146), other French West Indian writers such as Depestre and Frankétienne present same sex desire as intrinsic to the region. Frankétienne's Kreyòl (creole) novel, *Adjanoumelezo*, employs the voice of Gédé — the jocular Vodou lwa of life, death, overflowing sexuality and bawdiness — to speak openly about the important role that queers play in Vodou:

PapaGédé trase vèvè ak tilètfen pou bèl plezi sou fey papye. Li jwe ak mo jan li pito. Li koud mo, brase mo, bowde mo. Li taye mo gangans pou abiye pawòl bòzò, dekòre fraz ak bèl dantèl chèlbè. PapaGédé pa gen pwoblèm ni lawontèz ni lakrentif pou di sa li wè, sa li tande, sa li santi.

[Papa Gédé draws cosmograms with small fine letters for his pleasure on sheets of paper. He plays with words. He sows words. He solders words. He hems words. He dresses words and phrases in decorative lace. Papa Gédé has no problem or shyness to say that which he sees, hears or feels.] (Frankétienne 12)

Gédé's lack of shame allows the articulation of an erotics of women-loving-women that turns 'madevinez' from derogatory epithet into passionate poetic embellishment: 'Lang zo doubout lemante boboun lakansyèl. Odè chalé divinite lavoutselès madivinout madivinbouch louvri chemen ozannanna lan mitan pwèl jòf latoudlin mète'm sou sa' [The smell of the divinity along the celestial route of the rainbow, dyke-route, dyke-mouth, open up the path as if cutting through the middle of a pineapple] (Frankétienne 249).

Similarly, Gédé's voice locates the source of sexual desire of men for men in the phallus of Dambala, the snake god. Paralleling his earlier beautification of



Going into trance for Gédé, the bawdy and humorous deity of death, allows female Vodouisants to assume the phallus at a Vodou ceremony in Montreal.

‘*madevinez*’, Frankétienne explains the effeminacy of the ‘*masisi*’ as divine in nature, coming about through male devotion to Lasirenn. Frankétienne writes:

Wouy! Wouy! Wouy! Boubounn mwen cho ap kontrakte hip hip hip dekalann yannan kalmason lan djòl krab respirasyon gwosouf hip hip hip huraa! Konyen mwen pran chè. M’ap souse piwouli tèt sèpan. M’ap moulèn vyann koulèv. M’ap manje venn zozo. M’ap vale goupion zokoupyon zokòksis. Alsiyis lasirèn monte gam simidò similò lan mizik *masisi*, dyèz ak bemòl, sirèn siflèt, sirèt siwo, siwèl sikren, sisilibon. Wouch! Wouch! Wouch!

[Wow! Wow! Wow! I am hot. I take a deep breath opening my mouth like the crab to exclaim hip! hip! hurrah! I am sucking on the head of a serpent. I am twisting the serpent’s meat. I am eating the cock’s vein. I am groping the tailbone. The mermaid calls the faggot sweet things, honey, cherry and mounts him. Oh boy! Oh boy! Oh boy!] (Frankétienne 513)

In fact, Frankétienne’s spiralist word play leads us to the origins of the word *Masisi* in the Fon language of Benin and Togo: ‘Mami Wata is about fertility, femaleness, and beauty. Mostly women become Mamisis; men who become Mamisis are particularly good-looking and often dress and plait their hair like women’ (Rosenthal 118). The African counterpart of Haitian Lasirenn is Mami Wata, whose initiates, Mamisis — read: *Masisis* — embody the femininity of the deity. The Fon term for initiates of the sea goddess becomes in Haiti a referent to male homosexuality.

While Frankétienne’s *Adjanoumelezo* honours the full pantheon of Vodou laws — ‘Alapòt chwal dambala soule lan kalfou demanbre. Pou rive pi wo pi lwen, nou mande atibonlegba louvri baryè nou. N’ap file glise desann lan dife ogoun, lan van liko. N’ap chire dlo simbi andezo’ [Dambala’s horse is on at the crossroads, torn apart. In order to go higher and farther, we ask Legba to open the barrier for us. We glide and descend into the fire of Ogun. We are troubling Simbi’s water] (Frankétienne 60) — Gédé and Lasirenn occupy a primordial role in the narrative: the first because of this unbridled sexuality; and the second because of her associations with same-sex loving male initiates.

In Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire’s film *Des Hommes et Dieux*, *masisis* owe their desire not to Lasirenn, but to Ezili Dantò — the eternal mother spirit and a lwa who some consider to be a lesbian (René & Houlberg 299). With the backdrop of marketplaces, hair salons, Vodou temples, sacred waterfalls and dance clubs in Haiti, this groundbreaking film gives voice to a range of Haitian *masisis*, most of whom explain their same sex desire as stemming from their spiritual connection to Dantò. There is Blondine, who sells tobacco snuff in the Port-au-Prince street market as passers-by mock him for his effeminate demeanour, appearance and trade. He is tired of the insults in Haiti and would like to move to the Dominican Republic someday. He says that ‘Lwa gate’m’ [the lwa spoiled me] and that his father accepts his orientation as ‘bagay mistik’ [something sacred]. There is Denis, who is seen at an *Ounfò* singing to Dantò ‘Maman kote ou ye?’ [Mother, where are you?]. There is Innocente who also feels he has been the victim of



A Vodou initiate points to his spiritual mistress, Erzulie Dantor, in Lescot Magloire's film *Des Hommes et Dieux*.

prejudice because 'moun pa eklere' [people are uneducated]. His public humiliations have lessened a great deal since he became an *Oungan*, or Vodou priest. His family accepts him because it is 'bagay mistik' caused by Ezili. He has adopted his sister's child, acting out of the maternal instinct with which Erzulie has gifted him. All these men use Kreyòl terms to name their lived experience: *masisi*, *madevinez*, *en kache*. None use 'gay,' 'lesbian,' or 'the closet'.

However, class divisions in Haiti become clear when the interviewees with a higher degree of education and better command of French come on the screen. Fritzner, an *Oungan*, says that people are born like this, and that placing the origin of same-sex desire on Dantò is rubbish. In his Frenchified Creole, he uses French terms to define same-sex desire: 'homosexuelle', 'homo,' and 'lesbienne'. Speaking in French, Érol also speaks of 'homos' and 'héteros'. He explains that queer men say they have been 'appellé par Erzulie' [called by Ezili] in order to avoid Western taboos and find safety in the refuge of 'la religion de la tolerance'. According to his reasoning, men who love men choose Dantò, rather than her choosing them. They know that she is a mother who accepts her children just the way they are. She will not turn them away. However, his reason does not prevent him from accepting that in the phenomenon of trance possession something quite transcendental occurs with respect to gender. He acknowledges that when men lend their bodies to Dantò these male bodies are transformed by the femininity of the goddess. Similarly, he believes that Ogun is able to 'change l'esprit de femme en homme' [transform the spirit of a woman into a man's].

While the film exposes the hardship of being a sexual minority in a country not always friendly to difference, its narrative is not one of tragedy, but of joy in the face of adversity and of the hope of overcoming difficulties. For instance, the dancers at the *kompa* club underscore the health dangers of casual sex in the country with



A male Vodouisant in trance for Erzulie Freda, the lwa of female sexuality, opulence and beauty in Lescot Magloire's film, *Des Hommes et Dieux*.

the highest incidence of HIV infection in the Western Hemisphere. Nevertheless, there is catharsis for this anxiety, and the homophobia, at the ritual bathing at the St. Jacques waterfalls.

The film is to be commended for giving voice to men from a wide range of social classes and professions. However, the film is not always sensitive to issues of language when it translates *masisi* and *madevinez* in the subtitles using First World terminologies. Furthermore, the film should be criticised for its foregrounding of the troubling issue of causality: that is, what makes these men gay? Perhaps a more helpful question might have been: what accounts for the large numbers of people who are non-heteronormative in these religions? Such a question would have likely yielded a fruitful exploration on the non-binary quality of Vodou, a multiplicity beyond the dualism of maleness and femaleness, and an elucidation of how the phenomena of possession allow cross-gender identifications.

Unlike the Western idea of a unitary self that is fixed within the body, the Afro-Diasporic philosophical-religious tradition conceives the body as a concavity upholding a self that is removable, external and multiple. Allowing for a wider range of subjectivities than the more rigid Western model, the modular Afro-Diasporic discourse of personhood becomes a vehicle for the articulation of non-compliant identities that are usually constrained by normative heteropatriarchy. Haitian literary works like René Depestre *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, Frankétienne's *Adjanoumelezo* and films like Lescot and Magloire's *Des Hommes et Dieux* illustrate this modular and transcorporeal view of the African Diasporic self in their representations of trance possession, uses of ritual containers and the phenomenon of zombification.

NOTES

- ¹ All translations are my own.

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RACHEL MORDECAI

‘The same bucky-massa business’: Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the One Love Peace Concert

Peter Tosh’s performance at the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, on 22nd April 1978, is (in)famous for its militancy and strident rejection of the very premise of the occasion:

Dis concert here whey dem say is a PEACE concert, I man nevva did a go come inno. Yu know why? Cause wha, was a PEACE concert. An ah wonder if many people realise what de word PEACE mean. Eeh? Yu see most intallectual people in society tink de word PEACE means coming togeda. PEACE is de dipluma yu get in de cemetery. Seen! On top a yu grave dat is mark ‘Here Lies De Bady of John Strokes, Rest in PEACE.’ Seen!

An I know many of you lickle brothers woodn like to hear yu dawter say she’s gon to give away a little PIECE, a bongo clippins, yu no seen. So yu can imagine how defective Peace is. Seen!¹

The concert had been arranged to celebrate a truce in the savage political wars between armed gangs of PNP and JLP ‘enforcers’ in the streets of Kingston. The event had practical aims: some of the proceeds were earmarked to fund various initiatives in the affected communities. But the symbolism was paramount: a massive concert to bring together members of formerly warring factions with the benediction of reggae music, it was also the occasion of Bob Marley’s first performance in Jamaica since having been shot in his Kingston home in December 1976. The most famous image from the concert is of Marley on stage, flanked by Prime Minister Michael Manley and opposition leader Edward Seaga, holding their clasped hands together over his head. The moment was seen as heralding a new day of popular unity and political co-operation; as it turned out, the truce did not survive much past its celebration. Yet what matters for my purpose here is the strong contrast between Tosh’s militant stance on that night and the generally conciliatory tone of the event, including the other musical performances.²

The subversive tenor of Tosh’s performance has been widely remarked: Stephen King notes that Tosh ‘attacked Jamaica’s corrupt social and political system’ (11); Brian Meeks (1997) comments, ‘[Tosh] clearly questions the aim of facile political unity which was fostered by some people in that peace concert’ (np); and Roger Steffens calls the performance ‘incendiary.... Calling down fire and brimstone on the rulers of Jamaica, seated uncomfortably before him in the

second row of the National Stadium.... Tosh became the living embodiment of the conscience of his nation' (np).

Erin Mackie and Carolyn Cooper offer the most extensive analyses of Tosh's performance. Mackie focuses on the figure of the outlaw, and the explicit link that Tosh makes between famous pirates from Jamaica's colonial past and the 'rude boys of West Kingston' who, Tosh alleges, have taken 'the glorified marauders celebrated in Caribbean history' (26) as role models. Cooper points to Tosh's subversive word play — the neologism 'shitstem' for system, and particularly the dual-pronged pun on peace (quoted above). Through such linguistic play, Cooper suggests, 'Tosh totally reconfigured the politics of the peace concert, defining an alternative discourse of black integration that included even Lucifer — the police — however temporarily' (np). I generally agree with Mackie's and Cooper's arguments, and I have taken Cooper's formulation of Tosh's 'alternative discourse of black integration' as instructive. However, this discussion will take a more detailed look at the movement and scope of Tosh's performance than is attempted by either, and will focus particularly on Tosh's elaboration of the black collective subject of Jamaican-ness, and its ultimately revolutionary implications.

There are several accounts of how the truce that gave rise to the concert came about; two, at least, describe it as a direct result of the Green Bay massacre of 5th January 1978, in which ten young men — JLP loyalists — were lured to an army firing range outside of Kingston with the promise of guns. There they were fired upon by soldiers; five were killed, and the others escaped. Speculation about the agents and motives behind the massacre was rife; nothing was ever definitively proved. In any case, when the story of Green Bay spread (the army's cover story having crumbled rapidly), the effect on Kingston's urban poor transcended party lines: 'now they saw how expendable their lives really were. Slowly a gang truce began to take shape in the tribalized ghettos of Kingston' (Gunst 103–104).

From all accounts, the truce was negotiated among those most immediately affected; the involvement of the party leadership came later, in organising the public celebration. The concert took place at the National Stadium in Kingston; ticket prices were kept low to encourage attendance by all citizens. A line-up of popular Jamaican performers was assembled, with Bob Marley as the star attraction. Tosh agreed (reluctantly, by some accounts) to appear, but then delivered a performance that radically subverted the event's celebratory spirit and the assumptions of its organisers.

I am contending here that the significance of Tosh's performance extends far beyond a gesture of opposition to the Jamaican political establishment. An examination of the themes and recurrent figures of Tosh's performance reveals a complex conceptualisation of Jamaican identity, at a time when that category was being intensely contested. Despite the common perception that the turbulent decade of the 1970s in Jamaica was about the contest between democratic socialism (championed by the People's National Party [PNP] which formed the

government after 1972) and free-market capitalism (advocated by the opposition Jamaica Labour Party [JLP]), the period was also the occasion of a struggle over membership in the Jamaican nation.

As Obika Gray (1991) and Rex Nettleford (1998) have observed, Jamaica exited its colonial period in the midst of a struggle over identity. This battle was engaged primarily along racial-cultural lines over the extent to which Jamaican identity should be predicated on blackness and the African ancestry of the majority. Gray frames this struggle as a contest between two ‘incompatible rival models of “Jamaicanness”’: a black nationalism that developed among the worker-peasantry in the early twentieth century, and what Gray calls ‘Jamaican Exceptionalism’ (13), a norm of Jamaican identity, advanced by the socioeconomic elites, that focused on multiracial harmony. Such a norm rejected any one ethnic group’s claim to comprising the (racial) essence of Jamaicanness; it was a direct challenge to surging black or Afro-centric consciousness among Jamaicans. This conflict did not erupt suddenly in the 1970s; Gray calls the 1960s ‘a period in which class conflicts were played out on the terrain of culture ... [and] Individual identity and nationality became objects of political struggle’ (13). To this extent the contestation of the 1970s was a continuation of the preceding decade, with the significant difference that upon Michael Manley’s election in 1972, the government had begun to weigh in publicly upon the side of black nationalism (a significant departure from the stance taken by the JLP government of the 1960s).

Into this contentious discursive field, Tosh inserts a construction of Jamaicanness predicated upon three inter-related components: the centrality of a racially based collective subject, with blackness as the foundation of belonging, awareness and action; the potent combination of righteousness and defiance; and a long historical view of the experience of diasporic black people, in which the 1970s were merely a continuation of centuries of colonialist, racist oppression. In Tosh’s view, not only do black people have a claim to citizenship in the Jamaican nation, theirs is the pre-eminent claim. On his understanding, a historically constructed blackness is the core of Jamaican identity; everything else is ancillary. It is worth noting that the major elements of Tosh’s position can be traced to his grounding in Rastafarianism, and as such can also be identified in the music of other reggae artists of the time, not least Bob Marley. It also bears pointing out that, on this particular occasion, only Tosh was articulating this Rasta perspective from a radically oppositional stance.

Tosh’s set opens with the Rastafarian piety of ‘Ighziabeher (Let Jah Be Praised)’. Here Tosh not only establishes an unambiguous moral position — expressing devotion to the deity and drawing a distinction between the faithful and the ‘workers of iniquity’ — but also signals the creation of a Rasta-centric (and therefore Afro-centric) cultural space. Moreover, Tosh’s posture is not that of the meek, but of the righteous, who fully expect to be exalted by the workings of

divine justice. Thus, the song issues both a promise to the faithful and a warning to the wicked:

Fret not thyself
Because of evildoers
Neither be thou envious
Against the workers of iniquity
For they shall soon be cut down
Cut down like grass
And they shall wither like corn.
[Spoken:] Let Jah arise
And let all His enemies scatta

Indeed, as I will show, the collective subject created by Tosh in this performance — which is in some aspects, though not all, coterminous with the community of the righteous evoked in 'Ighziabeher' — may expect to be the active instrument, and not merely the beneficiary, of the divine will as it manifests in history.

Tosh transitions seamlessly from 'Ighziabeher' to 'Four Hundred Years', implying that a righteous stance necessarily creates awareness of and protest against the long trajectory of the oppression of black people, beginning with the Middle Passage and slavery. 'Four Hundred Years' is in many ways the linchpin of his performance. Here, Tosh's creation of the black collective subject informs and is informed by his long historical vision:

Just look how long: it's four hundred years (four hundred years, four hundred years)
And it's the same old-time colonial imperialistic philosophy
Said, it's four hundred long gone years (four hundred years, four hundred years)
And my people, my people just begin to see
But if you come on with me
There is a land, a land of liberty
Where we can live, we gonna live a good life
And you know we got to be free, we got to be free

This is not the observation of a bystander, but of an engaged subject: it is 'my people' to whom the persona of the song addresses himself, and he includes himself among the 'we' who are moving towards freedom.

Significantly, Tosh emphasises not only the historically delimited experience of slavery, but the continuity of oppression through the decades since emancipation in 1838. This continuity fuels the urgency of Tosh's message: it is this sameness of which, he insists, his people (soon to be figured as 'I-an-I') are just becoming aware. The trauma of the present draws its symbolic and emotional resonances from the trauma of the past; contemporary experiences of deprivation and despair continue to re-vivify the collective memory of slavery, lending it ever-renewed potency. Also, the slavery metaphor has particular vibrancy for Tosh as a Rasta. Rastafarian symbology refers to Rastas in particular, and New World black people in general, as latter-day Israelites in bondage, exiled in Babylon and groaning towards liberation. Here is an instance of the memory of slavery functioning, in

Gilroy's words, as 'a living intellectual resource in [black people's] expressive political culture' (39). This is slavery as a productive figure, and Tosh uses it to full effect as 'Four Hundred Years' moves to its climax.

'Look how long!' Tosh wails, the force of his voice highlighting the duration of the black experience of oppression. This leads into a dramatic moment: most of the instruments drop away, leaving only the song's rhythmic skeleton. Tosh's voice is thrown into sharp relief as he sings, 'Four hundred years / And it's the same old-time *bucky-massa* philosophy'. His emphasis on 'bucky-massa' is pronounced, a pointed reminder of Jamaica's status as a neo-plantation society. The bucky-massa (or *backra-massa*) is the white slave owner, a figure of domination and the incarnation of power wedded to injustice. In a just society there may be leaders, but there are no bucky-massas; Tosh's message is that Jamaica in 1978 is still closer to the plantation than to the just society.

Later, in the short speech that precedes 'Burial', Tosh elaborates on what he means by 'the same bucky-massa philosophy': 'Well right now yu ave a system or a shitstem whey gwaan inna dis country ya fe a long ages a imes. Four hundred years, and de same bucky massa bizniz. An black inferiority, and brown superiority and white superiority rule dis lickle black country here fe a long imes'. Tosh points to the racial oppression, the cultural denigration of black people that has warped Jamaican society; more significantly, he identifies Jamaica as a black country that has been under the misrule of a racist ideology. This is Tosh's claim for the fundamental blackness of the category 'Jamaican'. In the early twenty-first century, it may seem unremarkable to refer to Jamaica as a black country. In 1978 it was perhaps becoming unremarkable, but, as Stuart Hall contends, 'Black is an identity which had to be learned and could only be learned in a certain moment. In Jamaica that moment is the 1970s' (116). Tosh's statement occurs in a time when calling Jamaica a black country was still polemical and when the question of a national racial identity was still a contested one, despite the multiracialist national motto, 'Out of Many, One People'.³ The ideology of multiracialism has had equivocal success in Jamaica, some argue, because it has masked the bucky-massa bizniz that Tosh decries: a hierarchical multiracialism, in contrast to racial equality.

Offering an antidote to the racist distortion of Jamaican society, Tosh closes his brief speech with a marvellous assertion, both warning and promise: 'Well, I-an-I come wid earthquake, lightnin and tunda to break down dese barriers of oppression, drive away transgression and rule equality between humble black people'. This is clearly a riff on the lyrics of Marley's song 'Exodus' — 'Jah come to break downpression / Rule equality / Wipe away transgression / Set the captives free' — a reference the audience would undoubtedly recognise. In Tosh's version here, Jah as the agent of justice is replaced by 'I-an-I' — a complex, and central, Rasta expression. Used as the first-person pronoun, it can be variously singular and plural, and recognises the existence of the divine within each

individual (Murrell et al 1998 447). Moreover, as Nathaniel Murrell and Burchell Taylor point out, 'The expression 'I-an-I' ... links a vibrant hope to a clearly perceived destiny of freedom, justice, righteousness, and peace' (1998 392). Thus, here Tosh's community of the righteous from 'Ighziabeher' and his historically constructed black collective subject from 'Four Hundred Years' merge by way of Rasta ontology, and are named 'I-an-I'. Arguably, Tosh is also exploiting the flexibility of the pronoun, and using it here to mean both the singular Tosh (as prophet and avenging angel) and the aroused, black Jamaican collective subject whom he is rhetorically evoking. Further, note his insistence on racial identity ('humble black people'), and the suggestive tension between lowliness ('humble black people') and power ('earthquake, lightnin and tunda').

I should point out one more instantiation of the Jamaican collective subject which is also subsumed under Tosh's I-an-I: the persona of 'Stepping Razor' (which precedes, in the order of Tosh's performance, the speech just discussed). Meeks and Omar Davies agree that 'Stepping Razor,' with its truculent self-assertion and overt threats ('If you wanna live, treat me good ... I'm a stepping razor, don't you watch my size / I'm dangerous'), is emblematic of the style and stance Tosh sought consistently to project as his public persona.⁴ But, as Meeks points out, it is important to note the collective and political resonances in this act of individual self-fashioning: "'Razor" is Tosh', Meeks says, 'but [it] is also virtually a leitmotif for the poor in class-divided Jamaica' (n.p.). 'Razor' is also an evocation of the *rude bwoy*, a figure dating back to the 1960s that — surfing the intersections of politics, protest, and popular culture — comes to have considerable currency in the 1970s.

Garth White defines the rude bwoy as 'that person, native, who is totally disenchanted with the ruling system; who generally is descended from the "African" elements in the lower class and who is now armed with ratchets (German made knives), other cutting instruments and ... guns and explosives' (39). In 'Stepping Razor' the rude bwoy, small but deadly, warns any would-be 'bully' or 'chucky'⁵ not to be deceived by his size:

I'm like a cutting razor
Don't watch my size
I'm dangerous (dangerous)
(I'm like a stepping razor, don't you watch my size) I'm so dangerous

My use of 'small' here should be taken in a social, not physical, sense: social hierarchy in Jamaica is commonly expressed in terms of 'big men' and 'small men'.⁶ The threat is both explicit and dire: 'If you wanna live / Treat me good'. Don't mess with me/us, is the message, and coming after 'Four Hundred Years', it advances an alternative to the passivity bemoaned in that song, of 'sit[ting] down on your pride'. Here the posture is defiant, not quite on the offensive but stridently on the defensive.

As with 'Four Hundred Years', the song comes to the fullness of its dramatic impact at the end, where Tosh chants a litany of violent possibilities:

I'm like a cutting, flickin, lootin, shootin, stabbin, steppin, [...]
 I'm dangerous
 I'm like a stepping, walkin, flickin, bumpin, shootin, stabbin...
 I'm so dangerous.

Tosh may be signifying the society's growing anxieties about violent crime, an increasingly urgent concern. It is hard not to read this as an incantatory celebration of violence, but it would be wrong not to read it also within the context of Tosh's broader social critique. This is not motiveless malignancy, but backlash from a collective subject too long exploited, denigrated and marginalised. Moreover, Tosh may want to remind his audience that the representatives of 'decent society' there present — particularly the politicians — are not above deploying, for their own purposes, the rude-bwoy posturing (and violence) of the urban poor.

Like 'Stepping Razor', 'Burial' expresses a strident posture and contains the (somewhat more oblique) threat of violence. However, it is lyrically more complex, and draws together many of the themes and motifs that are at play throughout the performance. There is the theme of revelation, a people becoming undeceived ('Now we know the truth / We find you wearin the boot'), that has already been raised in 'Four Hundred Years', and will be brought to fruition in 'Get Up Stand Up,' which closes the performance. As in 'Ighziabeher', there is the voice of righteousness inveighing against the evildoer:

What a big disgrace
 Di way how di pirate dem rob up di place
 Dem grab everyting they can find
 And I said, dey even rob the blind.

The dichotomy established here between the righteous and the wicked is further elaborated by a parallel distinction between the living and the dead:

Let the dead bury the dead
 And who is to be fed, be fed
 I ain't got no time, no time to waste on you
 Cause I'm a livin man, got lots a work to do.

A living (righteous) man has no time for the dead (the spiritually bankrupt), because he has 'lots a work to do', the work of feeding those who need it. And why? Because 'the rich man's heaven [Jamaica] is the poor man's hell'. The living/dead distinction is one Tosh will pick up again in the speech immediately following the song; 'living' suggests also 'livity', which is righteous living, in accordance with the natural order and the injunctions of Jah.⁷

In the speech that follows 'Burial', Tosh mounts his deconstructive attack on the ideal of peace, as quoted at the beginning of this article: 'PEACE is de dipluma yu get in de cemetery'. More than this, Tosh seems to announce the

advent of a new era, one initiated by the increasing enlightenment and sense of agency among black people to which he is contributing. Thus, having rejected 'peace' as the central premise of the evening, he says 'When black people come togeda and feget say well, someting — dere is a destructive element between I an I what segregate I an I, which was a force laid dung by Lucifa, seen. But now dat I know dat Lucifa hands and foot will soon be bound, seen. An I shall cast him into outta daakness, an bring love an justice to black people once more'. This is the 'alternative discourse of black integration' to which Cooper refers: the redemption of I-an-I from the internecine conflict instigated by an external force, Lucifa, which Cooper glosses as the police, but which may more broadly signal both metaphysical malevolence and physical agents of the competing political camps. Interestingly, Tosh uses the specifically singular 'I' here, rather than the collective (or ambiguous) 'I-an-I'. I-an-I will be saved, but (it seems) Tosh will do the saving, by awakening the collective to its true nature and purpose.

The extent to which Tosh's language and imagery draw from the Judeo-Christian bible will already have become apparent. This is entirely consistent with his location within Rastafari; Murrell and Lewin Williams observe that 'the Bible has a preeminent place in Rastafarian life and thought because, for them, it is a book written by and about Blacks. As a result, the biblical materials pervade almost every form of Rastafarian discourse' (1998 326). But Rastas are also deeply conscious of the central role played by Christian churches in justifying the enslavement of Africans with recourse to scripture. Thus, 'With their "hermeneutics of suspicion", [Rastafarians] are selective in their use of biblical materials, so as not to propagate "white distortions" of the Bible and continue the ideology of Babylon' (1998 327).

This Rastafarian 'hermeneutics of suspicion' provides a context for understanding Tosh's rhetoric, which roundly criticises Christianity and Christians while drawing deeply from the same sources and elaborating many of the same themes. Thus, even while he signifies on Matthew 22:13,⁸ Tosh goes on to excoriate those who have used religion to exploit the oppressed:

learn dis man, white man teach I an I say I an I ha fe dead go a heaven. Why? Dat dem can come a Jamaica come take whey de whole a de sun. Yu no seen, an inherit de blood baat Eart. An we gaan a whey? Heaven, gaan drink milk and honey. Cause we a wha? Fool. Dem tell we say cow jump ova moon and dish run way wid bongo clippins spoon. Me a tell yu! Yu ever check dem ting deh?

Here Tosh elaborates the distinction between the dead and the living from the song 'Burial': the dead are the befuddled, who have been blinded by religion and have abandoned their birthright to swindlers. Tosh reduces religion to absurdity, implying its equivalency with nursery rhymes, and heaping scorn on the credulous. Again, he grounds his argument in a long historical vision:

Yu see dem lickle game here, is juss some games whey Columbus an Henry Maagan an Francis Drake, Bartolomew Dila Cassus, who was de fuss guy come roun wid dem

cross roun him neck fe come trick black people and say rite now black people is Israel so if we waan hole dem de ongle ting we can hole dem wid is tell dem say see de cross dere, an fe falla Jesus him soon come back.

Look how blood baat lang we deh ya a wait pan Jesus. Eeh! All now, to blood baat. All de war in de Eart, Jesus cyaan do a ting bout it a graass cyaat.⁹ Yu no seen! A who ha fe go do dat? Is I an I ave to come togeda wid love, seen? Heartical love and respec fe each adda.

Here Tosh comes to the crux of his ‘dread sermon’ (to use Cooper’s phrase): delusion must be replaced by enlightenment, passivity by agency. And here the agency is unequivocally collective: Tosh performs as the prophet, but the action must come from all the people. Moreover, Tosh clarifies the necessary alternative to the deadening ‘peace’ of the concert’s title: enlightened, collective action pursued ‘wid heartical love an respec fe each adda’. While this may appear at first glance as a rather tepid injunction, Tosh’s demand is grounded in the ethos of Rastafari: *heartical* signals ‘emotions, feelings, and spiritual upliftment (not necessarily religious) as an attachment to the Rasta culture’ (Murrell et al 1998 446). Respect, moreover, is an attitude so prized in Jamaican interpersonal relations that it has been ritualised into a greeting.

Beyond reconfiguring the politics of the peace concert and rendering it an occasion of black togetherness, Tosh makes it a consciousness-raising event, an occasion for truth-telling and what Bob Marley famously called emancipation from mental slavery.¹⁰ Tosh’s message is that, when Jamaicans become aware of their true nature (African, free, inter-connected, powerful) and infuse their actions and relations with that awareness, there will be no need for specious declarations of peace. When he turns, in the next breath, to enjoining his listeners to put Jamaica’s resources to work for the benefit of all its people, rather than allowing their exploitation by external actors, his direct address to Manley and Seaga seems almost a formality. Tosh has made it plain that his real audience is I-an-I, the Rasta-imbued Jamaican collective. It is I-an-I to whom he appeals, and in whom his hope resides.

The last three songs of Tosh’s set (‘Equal Rights,’ ‘Legalize It,’ and ‘Get Up Stand Up’) all address, in various ways, the themes already discussed here. But it is Tosh’s rendition of ‘Get Up Stand Up’ that draws the elements of his performance together into a brilliant piece of musical incitement. Each of the three original Wailers — Tosh, Marley and Bunny Wailer — performed solo versions of this song at various points, in addition to the versions the group performed together. Of these, Meeks says Tosh’s version is ‘a far more essentially militant and aggressive one’ than the versions performed by the group — and this performance certainly supports that assessment. Simple changes such as ‘Don’t give up *this* fight’ rather than the more common ‘Don’t give up *the* fight’ lend urgency and specificity to the message. Tosh’s insertions of — variously — ‘my brothers’, ‘sisters’, and ‘black people’ after the line ‘Stand up for your rights’ repeatedly evoke the collective of I-an-I, and underline its grounding in a

common racial identity. The long historical view is here in 'Half my history was never told' (the more widely familiar version is 'Half the story has never been told'), which reappears later as 'Half black people history was never told'. There is an echo of 'Four Hundred Years' in the line 'You've been down too long', which is interposed in the third chorus between the normally sequential lines 'Get up stand up' and 'Don't give up this fight'.

As the song progresses, its anger and militancy seem to increase, as if Tosh, at the end of the long jeremiad of his performance, is ascending towards frenzy. 'Bullshit' appears twice in the song's second half — both times in relation to the critique of Christianity as a misleading and pacifying doctrine: 'Sick and tired of this bullshit game / Die and go to heaven in Lord Jesus name' and 'Preacher man don't tell me bullshit / Heaven is under earth'. Finally, the song climaxes in a defiant, almost inflammatory chant of resistance that seems directed towards both the incitement of I-an-I, and the provocation of those defenders of the status quo who, Tosh acknowledges, will be offended and alarmed by his message:

Git up, stand up
Stand up for your rights, *you going to war*
Git up, stand up
I say, don't give up the fight
Dem don't like this, but
Git up, stand up
I said, stand up, stand up for your rights
Git up, stand up
We ain't goin bow to no bucky-massa
We ain't goin bow to no colonialism
We ain't goin to bow to no, no ism
We ain't goin bow to no imperialism
*Cause dem pack up a whole bag a schism*¹¹

This is chanting down Babylon at its most potent. At the end of his performance Tosh sums up the array of forces conspiring against the liberation of I-an-I, simultaneously declaring and demanding I-an-I's rebellion against them. The interplay between 'I', 'we', and 'you' here exploits the fluidity of I-an-I, that Tosh deploys elsewhere to posit himself as both one within the collective and a prophet set apart — but 'dem' is unambiguously other, unambiguously the enemy, and potentially intended to include the politicians, state officials and other power brokers among the audience. If, as I have claimed, Tosh is intervening in the 1970s contestation over the nature of Jamaican identity, it seems clear that his intervention is less black nationalist than black revolutionary. Jamaica is not yet the black nation that Tosh insists it must be; black people are not yet its full citizens. But I-an-I, as Tosh configures it here, is already powerful, and needs only revelation (of its true nature), righteousness, and collective resistance to achieve its long-denied emancipation.

Although some observers maintain that Peter Tosh's persona and his work positioned him on the radical edge of the generally counter-cultural movements of reggae and Rastafari, it is not my concern here to argue for Tosh's particularity as a militant, or to suggest that the historically grounded version of Jamaican blackness that he deploys in this performance is unique to him. He was, however, the uniquely and stridently dissenting voice at an event that otherwise suggested the harmonious (if temporary) integration of the ethos of reggae music with the agenda of the Jamaican political establishment. The One Love Peace Concert — and specifically the Marley-Seaga-Manley moment — has been cited as a rare moment of popular music having demonstrable political efficacy (Torres-Saillant 30–32). But in fact, the political unity celebrated on that evening preceded the concert, rather than being initiated by it, and disintegrated quite rapidly thereafter. That the iconic image persists in defining the concert's legacy, while the depth, force and arguably prophetic quality of Tosh's radical critique seems to have faded in popular recollection, is perhaps an object lesson in the inter-relationship between history and myth. Yet, listening to the recording from thirty years' distance, one is struck by the relentlessness of Tosh's performance, its salience at that particular historical moment, and the sheer rhetorical mastery with which he infuses righteousness into revolution; these things persist also.

NOTES

- ¹ The quotations from Tosh's speeches at the concert are taken from the liner notes to the CD recording of Tosh's performance. The speeches — which appear in the liner notes in a bilingual edition, English translation beside the original patwa — are reproduced from Carl Gayle's transcription, and were originally published in the magazine *Jah Ugliman*, vol. 1. I have amended the liner-notes version where it did not, to my ear, accurately reflect Tosh's speech.
- ² Other performers included Dennis Brown, Leroy Smart, Jacob Miller, Big Youth, and Ras Michael and the Sons of Negus. In several contemporary reports about the concert, Tosh's performance is singled out for its confrontational quality.
- ³ Thus, Michael Manley notes in 1974, 'While superficially accepting the notion of a multi-racial society, the truth is that Jamaica is not yet at peace with blackness or comfortable with its African heritage' (61). In the preface to his 1970 book dealing with race and identity in Jamaica, Rex Nettleford observes that the country's political leadership, when responding at the end of the 1960s to 'protests on behalf of the black majority,' was insistent 'that the society is a multi-racial unit — if not in fact, then certainly with the capacity of becoming so in the foreseeable future' (14). Further, Nettleford's introduction to the 1998 edition comments, 'The Rastafarian focus on Africa and things African gave many a reader problems at the time [of the first edition] and do [*sic*] to this day, especially those who refuse to see Jamaica as a predominantly black country and ritualistically invoke the national motto ... as if it were reality rather than aspiration' (viii).
- ⁴ It should be noted that Tosh did not write 'Stepping Razor'; the songwriter was Joe Higgs. Nevertheless, Davies opines, "'Stepping Razor" penned by the late Joe Higgs, must have been written for Tosh' (np).

- ⁵ While I'm not aware of *chucky* as a noun in the Jamaican language context, to *chuck* someone is to push or shove them. Also, it is common to speak of a hyper-aggressive person as *chucking badness*.
- ⁶ Tosh, speaking later in the performance, refers with delightful ambiguity to 'few lickie big guys' who hinder the aspirations of the poor to social mobility.
- ⁷ See Edmonds, especially pp.354–55, for a description of the basic meaning and elements of livity.
- ⁸ 'Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness; there is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be".'
- ⁹ Tosh's use of 'blood baat' and 'grass cyaat' here — like 'bongo clippins' elsewhere in the performance — represents creative substitutions for expletives ('blood-claat', 'raas-claat' and 'bumbo-claat', respectively).
- ¹⁰ 'Redemption Song'.
- ¹¹ Italics indicate lyrics that do not occur in album versions of the song.

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Olive Senior

SONG OF THE HOUSE

House too frail to
brace against a
hurricane. Any
breeze-blow can
topple it, a child
can tumble over it.
Yet let people sing
of it. Was made
by these hands.

Hands untrained
to make like
aeroplane, know only
reaping cane, planting
grain. Let them
marvel at the wonder
of it. These hands
made this house.

(from *Talking of Trees*, 1985, Calabash, Mona, Kingston, p. 41)

MICHAEL MCMILLAN

The ‘West Indian’ Front Room: Reflections on a Diasporic Phenomenon

The floors are carpeted, often with the high pile carpet locally termed ‘plush’. The furniture consists of thick foam-based seats covered in a fake velvet, arranged in sets of one or often two couches, plus armchairs often providing upholstered seating... The maroon of the upholstery may be picked up in curtains, carpets, coverings for tables, artificial flowers such as roses and countless other decorations, amounting to a general ‘any colour as long as it’s maroon’ principle, or its equivalent in gold/brown arrays. Artificial flowers are extremely common, often set into elaborate arrangements with perhaps half a dozen examples within the living room. There is a buffet which is a glass-fronted cabinet filled with china and glassware. It may also have internal lining of white or maroon plush. Wall decorations will be dominated by a machine-made tapestry with a religious theme, such as the Last Supper ... prints of oil paintings with gilt surrounds... Prints with a West Indian theme would very rarely be found in the normative living room. (Miller 1996 136)

This description from Daniel Miller’s essay, ‘Fashion and Ontology in Trinidad’, echoes an iconic aesthetic found in what has been called the ‘front room’. As a social and cultural phenomenon, the front room resonates all over the African Diaspora: from Kingston to Toronto, from Brooklyn to Brixton, from Amsterdam to Paramaribo. Emanating from the Victorian parlour, it was the ‘special’ room in the home, where you weren’t permitted, unless it was a Sunday or a special occasion when guests visited. As an opulent shrine to kitsch furniture, consumer fetish and homemade furnishings, it was a symbol of status and respectability, announcing that no matter how poor you were, if the front room looked good, then you were ‘decent’ people. In the Caribbean, the front room reflected the performance of middle class values — that is, the colonial elite in the domestic interior — whereas in Britain for West Indian migrants it symbolised working class respectability.

Diaspora in this context has to be treated metaphorically since, ‘Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return’. It is defined ‘not by essence or purity, but recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of “identity” that lives with and through as process, the idea of difference; by hybridity’ (Hall 1993 401). The front room was a contradictory space, where the efficacy of the display was sometimes more important than the authenticity of the objects. The presence of Jim Reeves, the drinks cabinet, the plastic pineapple ice bucket, floral patterned carpet and wallpaper, lace crochet, the ‘Blue-Spot’ radiogram, The Last Supper or plastic covered upholstery was less about valorised white-biased ideals of beauty, than the creolisation of popular culture.

The dressing and maintenance of the front room therefore reveals a form of 'impression management' as in the flexible presentation of self, which throws up issues of 'good grooming' amongst people of African descent. The front room was very much my mother's room, and as a second generation, black British person from an aspirant working class family of Vincentian parentage, I have my own memories, reflections and meanings of this space. Unpacking the detail of this space therefore raises questions about diasporic identities, inter-generational identifications and disavowal, gendered practices in the domestic domain and mis(sed)representations, struggles over meaning and authenticity in the museum/gallery culture.

The culturally syncretic nature of black popular culture where 'there is no such thing as a pure point of origin' (Hebdige 10) raises questions of authenticity in terms of defining a black aesthetic. Who, where and what is legitimised as an authentic black aesthetic? Given the history of representation of the 'Other' in museum/gallery culture, authenticity is problematic in terms of how it is constructed, policed and legitimised.

The term 'West Indian' is signified through the classic representation of the front room, and refers to a particular juncture in British history signified by cultural political shifts brought about by anti-colonialist struggles and movements for independence, Civil Rights and Black Power. Post-World War II black settlers in Britain may have been represented as socially problematic 'Others', but their participation in an emerging consumer culture meant that the front room came to signify the ongoing decolonising process in an attempt to re-define themselves. The political collapse of The West Indian Federation signified a proto-nationalist chauvinism between Caribbean countries: big island versus 'smallie' island. In British society where West Indian migrants were racially visibly invisible minorities, a West Indian identity emerged out of solidarity to resist racism while engaging with each other culturally and socially. One of the areas where West Indians found solidarity was in finding accommodation because signs in landlords' windows would often say, 'No Irish, No Dogs, No Coloureds'. Their experience of rented accommodation is a painful memory of the one-room cramped and squalid conditions many of my parents' generation had to endure. As families and spouses arrived from the Caribbean, more space was needed but many struggled to find a loan or mortgage. Consequently, the 'Partner Hand'/'SuSu', an informal localised saving scheme shared between a small group, was used to raise a deposit as down payment on a house. Whether in flats or houses, the West Indian front room as a product of diasporic migration began to take shape.

THE 'SPEAKY SPOKEY' OF THE FRONT ROOM

On British TV, during the 1970s, the front room as communal family space was where *The Fosters* attempted to reassure viewers that black families in sitcoms were just as 'normal' as white ones by sanitising cultural and racial difference (Donley & Taylor). Inscribed in the representation of black experience

on British TV was a race relations agenda about assimilation, and so the front room, as emblematic motif, came to signify 'West Indian' parents as conservative, upstanding, god-fearing citizens as opposed to their children (read male inscribed 'black youth') as problematic deviants. In a number of plays by black writers, the front room became a site of contested cultural identities and race politics. The tone of Caryl Phillips's description of the main set in his play, *Strange Fruit*, suggests this ambivalent relationship.

The action takes place in the front room of the Marshall's terraced house in one of England's inner city areas. Whilst the district is not a ghetto it is hardly suburbia. The room is cramped but comfortable and tidy ... a cabinet full of crockery that has never been, and never will be used... In the centre of the display is a plate commemorating the Queen's Silver Jubilee. In the centre of the room is an imitation black leather settee with orange/yellow cushions... As to the surroundings: the wallpaper is tasteless, and on the wall hang the usual trinkets... As I said the room is cramped, even claustrophobic, but tidy. (Phillips 7)

In Obaala Arts Collective's *From Generation to Generation: The Installation* (The Black Art Gallery, London 1985), there is 'a realistic simulation of the respective living rooms of two generations'. Two rooms are constructed and dressed, like a stage set, with the first room symbolic of a 'typical' living room of West Indian parents: 'a female mannequin is poised over an ironing board, the iron flex connected to the light bulb socket above ... opposite, another mannequin, male, dressed in a British Rail uniform and sitting in an armchair with a radio in his lap' (Francis 41). Reached by a dark passage, the second room is by contrast, alive with music, books and a canvas in the shape of the African continent, stretched on a black frame on which is inscribed the names of African heroes: Patrice Lumumba, Walter Rodney, Amílcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah. There are two mannequins: a male dressed in a tracksuit and a female in a batik frock. The domesticated room of the 'older generation' suggests a quaint and naive image fixed in the past, while the undomesticated room of the 'younger generation' is highly cultured and politicised. Ironically, here a domestic tradition is disavowed for the reconstruction of a contemporary domestic space. In setting a context, the artists' notes said of African-Caribbean parents, that

their general attitudes, towards their children's behaviour (was) (they should be seen and not heard); to the language they used (and attempted to use) especially when addressing their children, tried hard to follow the adage 'when in Rome — do as the Romans do' and sought to polish up their 'bad talking' and speak 'the Queen's English.'
(Francis 41)

In Errol Francis's critique of this installation, he sees an over-domestication of the older generation in the idea that African-Caribbean parents wanted their children to be 'seen and not heard', because it echoes a well worn stereotype that blames black families for their own oppression by enforcing draconian discipline in the home. This over-simplistic representation of the older generation negates their activism and political radicalism during the era of the Civil Rights and Black

Power movements. Active in labour struggles, they set up voluntary welfare organisations and made protests about the inferior education of their children in the British school system. They also read and supported *The West Indian Gazette*, one of the first black publications in Britain, edited and published by Claudia Jones, a journalist from the Caribbean, who was exiled from the United States for being a Communist. She used the *Gazette* to campaign on behalf of black defendants prosecuted after 1958 race riots in Notting Hill, the suburb that gave its name to the first Carnival during the 1960s which she was instrumental in organising. Therefore, as Francis asks, 'Can we accept the characterisation of our parents as virtually illiterate, save the Bible and correspondence courses?' (41)

Francis wonders how, on the basis of this caricature, the younger 'second generation' were able to keep alive patois/creole traditions from the Caribbean if they were suppressed in England. This suppression also occurred in the Caribbean, therefore the question is not whether, but how, where and by whom, patois/creole (read 'bad talking') was suppressed, hidden and used. The cultural hegemony of colonialism reflected in 'Orientalist knowledge', coded the 'Other's language as bastardised, pidgin and uncivilised. It is this psychic inferiorisation of 'Nation Language' that has 'provided a systematic framework for the political analysis of racial hegemonies at the level of black subjectivity' (Fanon 37). It is at this level of subjectivity that Suzanne Scafe, in her book, *Teaching Black Literature*, notes that black British students, weary of the stigma of being labelled as the 'race expert', claimed not to know how to speak creole while reading aloud black literary texts



The West Indian Front Room installation (Guest Curator: Michael McMillan, Geffrye Museum 2005–2006). © John Nelligan.

(50). The performative survival strategy utilised by these students echoes Ralph Ellison's recommendation to '[s]lip the yoke, and change the joke', and reflects the duality of race politics as a sobering lesson in the paradox of modernity: a means of freedom in expression, but also a means of suppression (45–59). It is the duality of the archetypal 'speaky spokey', (imitation of the language of the colonial elite) who spoke or 'attempted to use' the 'Queen's English', better than the Queen. The proverb of the older generation that, 'when in Rome — do as the Romans do', can now take on a double meaning in a discussion of how inter-generational identifications are signified in the representation of the front room.

In this framework, Stuart Hall argues that identity is a performative process, continually negotiated through a 'complex historical process of appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention and revival'. In this sense, 'Otherness' is not fixed and predetermined. Cultural identity in this formation is an 'articulation fostered in a complex structure of diverse and contradictory, yet connected relations' (1993 395). Beyond the essentialising binary opposition between colonialist and anti-colonialist, Hall proposes a concept of cultural identity as dialectically continuous and disruptive unstable points of identification, made within the discourse of history and culture. This idea that cultural identities can be dialectically continuous and disruptive reveals duality as double consciousness. Applied to my discussion, identification and disavowal can occupy the same space and enables a repositioning of where the subject sits in the front room. As a Trinidadian shopkeeper notes,

Maroon is a colour which is red but not red, but it is more Englishanese, North Americanese, Europeanese, I have never been there (England) but I believe they use a lot of this reddish off-reddish in their upholstery. (qtd in Miller 1994 214)

Coming through the front door of a 'West Indian' home in Britain, there might be a maroon coloured passage carpet with heavy floral patterns covered by a clear plastic 'runway'. These patterns symbolised the thick, lush tropical vegetation of 'back home'. As noted above, maroon also has different meanings, including a runaway slave living in remote areas in the Caribbean as well as symbolising the spilt blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. More prosaically it is the official colour of the West Indian cricket team and hides dirt well. The ambivalence of this word, 'maroon', invites a rethinking of the concept of difference, as put forward by Stuart Hall in his usage of Jacques Derrida's anomalous 'a' in 'différance', which challenges any fixed meaning and representation of difference. This 'strategic and arbitrary' conception enables a rethinking of the positioning and repositioning of Caribbean cultural identities suggested by Aimé Césaire's and Léopold Senghor's metaphors — *Présence Africaine*, *Présence Européenne* and more ambiguously, *Présence Américaine*.

The dialogue of power and resistance, of refusal and recognition, with and against *Présence Européenne* is almost as complex as the 'dialogue' with Africa. In terms of popular cultural life, it is nowhere to be found in its pure, pristine state.

(Hall 1993 400)



Wall-to-wall carpeting had intricate floral patterns symbolising tropical vegetation and, like the wallpaper, was a reminder of 'back home' in the Caribbean. Patterns were normally on a maroon background, which was practical because it didn't show up too much dirt. Maroon is not an authentic primary colour: it is red, but not red, which could be said to symbolise the blood of Jesus Christ and popular colour in the Caribbean. © Dave Lewis.

The 'difference' in these presences is a strategic and random display in which masking/covering up takes place at the same time, resisting the dominant hegemonic representation of the colonised 'Other' as savage/un-educated. The mask is the signifier, while the masquerade is the signified which, as a ritual practice from Africa, served as a means of camouflage in slave plantation society. The masquerade in this masking is the phenomenon of the 'cool': 'To exhibit grace under pressure' as reflected in personal character or 'Ashe', which became a means of inverting and subverting the brutal oppression of plantation society through imitation, reinvention and artifice (Thompson 35). In response to racial oppression, 'grooming' became a performance of the socialised and reconstructed Ashe as embodied in the style of black men and women's presentation.

'Grooming' as performance does not reveal all there is to know about black subjectivity, but it does reveal the mythic nature of black popular culture as a theatre of popular desires. 'Popular culture carries that affirmative ring because of the prominence of the word "popular"' (Hall 1992 21). Popular culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, and the traditions of the people. What Mikhail Bakhtin calls 'the vulgar' — the popular, the informal, the underside, the grotesque — is always treated as weary by the dominant tradition which fears that the low culture of the 'carnavalesque' might overwhelm

it. Therefore cultural hegemony, as Gramsci argued, is made, lost and struggled over, just as carnival was appropriated and reconstructed to subvert and transgress the power relations between master and slave (Bakhtin 60). The unpacking of the aesthetics and cultural practices of the front room reflects a blurring of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture, between taste and style, which connects to the 'dialogic interventions of diasporic, creolising cultures' (Mercer 1998 57).

It is this layering of complex identities and desires that became the inspiration for *The West Indian Front Room* exhibition that I curated at the Geffrye Museum (2005–2006). The curatorial framework was for a central front room installation designed and built to specific architectural specifications. It was decorated and dressed with artefacts reminiscent of the front room in West Indian homes from the late 1960s/early 1970s, which were sourced from personal loans, second hand shops, flea markets and car boot sales. It was further contextualised with large-scale photographs of families in their front rooms, iconic artefacts such as the paraffin heater, wallpaper, carpet, artificial flowers and crochet dollies. There were audio interviews about iconic objects found in the front room, accessed through dialling a number on a Bakelite telephone, and two short films reflecting memories of, and critical commentaries on, the front room. The exhibition touched a universal emotional chord amongst its 35,000 visitors during its five month duration and surprised the Geffrye Museum because its appeal went beyond a specific cultural group, much less class and generation. Conceptually, *The West Indian Front Room* has been the basis for a contemporary living room installation and exhibition, 'Van Huis Uit', that toured Amsterdam, Tilburg and Utrecht in The Netherlands and featured iconic domestic objects from second generation migrants of Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean, and Indo-European (Indonesian-European) descent.¹ Coming into the dressed front/living room installation, flashbacks, memories, and anecdotes are evoked, of events, conversations, customs, rituals, encounters, colours, smells and images of the occasional and everyday life experiences in African-Caribbean Diaspora. The great attraction for visitors to such installations is the evocation of a haptic world of touch, taste and smell as well as vision. The sensory domains are for the most part ignored or undertheorised in contemporary scholarship. The senses of smell, taste and touch, in particular, have traditionally been typed as too 'primitive' to have any real intellectual or aesthetic functions and therefore as irrelevant to the appreciation or understanding of collections. Yet these senses may also be engaged by collected objects in socially and personally meaningful ways. Similarly, collected objects, particularly when they come from other cultures or historical periods, may have highly significant sensory dimensions which are 'silenced' by present visualist methods of display.

Along with examining how and why certain domains of sensory experience such as touch, taste and smell have been cordoned off as inadmissible in the modern art or ethnographic museum, The Front Room project explores a range

of historical and contemporary alternative sites of collections. These sites include the church, the private collection in its historical and contemporary contexts, the department store, the theme park, and contemporary art exhibitions with multisensory dimensions. While diverse in their nature and objectives, these different sites of collections can all be seen to participate in an overlapping history of display practices and to play a crucial role in shaping future models for the presentation of collections. The fact that the emotional realm of the senses is very much under investigation at present raises questions about the dominant hegemony in contemporary museum culture: are the glass cases of the museum cracking under postmodern pressures for a reconstituted and revitalised sensorium? What will come out if they do?²

THE FRAMING OF ARRIVAL AND AMBITION

In his essay, 'Reconstruction Work', Stuart Hall looks at images of Post-war black settlement, such as *Picture Post's* 1956 pictorial essay on migration to England, 'Thirty Thousand Colour Problems'. The documentary realism of these images, represents these black subjects as 'social problems' waiting to happen, which echoes a colonialist construction of the 'innocent simpleton', too slow for the fast ways of the advanced modern world. The reality is that, 'they are probably from a city, like Kingston, as big and swinging in its poverty and style as any small colonial capital' (Hall 1984 4).

Hall, who came to England from Jamaica as a young man, notes that they were arriving at the end of one traumatic journey and uncertain at the beginning of another. With dignity packed deep in their suitcases, they were formally dressed as a sign of self-respect; with pressed dresses, hats at an angle in a 'universally jaunty cocky' style, in preparation for whatever was to happen next. For these immigrants, coming from the colonies, they saw themselves as British citizens and through education sometimes knew more about English culture than the English themselves. To wear your best garments on special occasions such as attending church was part of this sartorial principle, and travelling to a distant foreign land was no exception. 'Edwardian portraiture and the codes of the formal photograph, a formal icon in the domestic gallery of memories, was as common in poor but respectable homes in Kingston as it was in Kingston-upon-Thames' (Hall 1984 4). Style, self respect and respectability were inscribed in one's appearance, the same as in the 'High Street' photo-portraits, where we might find photos of

the young woman with the gloves and handbag, holding up or being held up by the basket of artificial flowers. The well-dressed young man with the clip-on fountain pens, talking on a phone which is not connected to anything, but sitting on top of a mock-Greek half-column straight from the disused basement of the British Museum.

(Hall 1984 5)

Frozen in time, these studio-composed photos in artificial environments, neither home or work, were how they imagined themselves. A reconstructing of the



It was the mother in the home who bought for, dressed and maintained the front room. This is a formal family portrait in Brixton, London, circa 1969. © Neil Kenlock.

subject as document was sent ‘back home’, in the form of photos and adhesive-backed pale blue airmail letters that were also portraits on the front room wall.

In his essay, ‘Aspiration and Attitude...Reflections on Black Britain in the Nineties’, Hall uses ‘frontlines/backyards’ as a metaphor in the context of exploring the meanings of an emergent black British identity.

In the public realm, frontlines are the politicised edge between black culture and white culture; backyards are where some less confrontational, more informal, more complicated, private negotiations might take place’. (Hall 1998 38)

The front room is a metaphorical ‘frontline’, because through its aesthetics and domestic practices, it displays a subtle ‘politicised edge between black and white culture’ (Hall 1998 42). This ‘edge’ is a performance of private ‘backyard’ imagined and reconstructed narratives, mediated by desire, status, difference, race, class, gender and generation. My parents tell me that an incentive for many West Indians to get married when they arrived in England, was that they could



The front room provided a perfect setting for formal portraits to be taken, such as with this woman dressed up before she goes out in Brixton, London, circa 1969. © Neil Kenlock.

claim tax relief. While the home in England reinforced the patriarchal division of labour with the man possibly buying the furniture, it was the woman's tastes and desires in consumer fetish and the like that made the room a potentially shared investment. Black women have usually had no choice but to deal with the domestic and go out to work. The making of the front room signifies on one level black women's aspiring mobility through their financial independence from men. The fruits of black women's labour 'through the slog of long, remorseless and difficult work', on show in the front room and the associated gendered practices in the domestic domain, contribute to the narrative of post-war black settlement (Hall 1998 42).

The front room is a generic term, that includes the living and sitting room, and for aspiring white working classes families it was inscribed with middle-class values. The etiquette of decorum, protocol, polite manners and proper behaviour

as performed rituals of this room, echoes the drawing room of the Victorian middle-class two-storey semi-detached and terraced houses. This became the front room of an aspiring burgeoning suburban bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century.

Racism meant that post-war black settlers could only find one-room rented accommodation, but as families were sent for or were being made, these insecure environments did not provide the stability they needed. If they did not get a council flat, then black people found getting a loan or mortgage to buy a house near impossible. The 'Partner Hand'/'SuSu', an informal localised saving scheme, enabled a deposit to be raised. In many urban inner city areas, black families moved into properties left vacant by the white middle class who had fled to the suburbs. Whether in flats or houses, the front room began to take shape.

When comparing the front room of post-war black settlers and the white working class, the emphasis is on the desire for social status through consumer fetish. What is not acknowledged is difference: difference in terms of how these settlers struggled to acquire a front room and how displacement, exile and alienation affected the meaning of that space. For post-war black settlers from the Caribbean, the front room was a response of 'arrival' and 'ambition' to a sense of displacement, exile and alienation in a foreign land. The front room could be an ostentatious display of wealth through material reality, but it was also a treasuring for tomorrow of dreams that had been deferred.

THE HOARDING OF 'NICE THINGS'

In finding a framework to unpack the complex subjective negotiations around identities, desire and ontology practised in the front room, Daniel Miller proposes a duality of two related concepts: the transcendent and the transient. The setting for his anthropological research is the oil boom in Trinidad during the 1970s, which transformed the lives of the poor, wealthy and nouveau riche alike. Materially this short-lived boom found its most manifest expression in people's homes, cars and clothes (Miller 1996 137). Semiotically, in the vernacular of the African Diaspora, the transcendent and transient have their equivalence in the terms 'follow-fashion' or 'never see, come see' and 'poppy-show' or 'extra', respectively. As adjectives, verbs and nouns, they serve as descriptions of consumer fetish and fashion desires in black popular culture.

As modes of expression, the transcendent signifies a desire for conventional form in 'artificial things which are viewed as long-lasting, and things covered over which are seen as cherished for the future', whereas the transient is concerned with the expression of style as a 'highly personalised and self-controlled expression of a particular aesthetic'. The duality of the transcendent and the transient says that fashion can be an agreement to conform and a struggle as 'a symbol of transience and disconformities' (Miller 1996 137).

The interplay between the transcendent and the transient sheds light on the contradictory nature of the front room, as a dialogue between being seen to conform to conventions in fashion, certain standards of taste, dealing with the

realities of everyday life, and finding one's own style. The frisson of consumer fetish is not necessarily what women see in the shop front window but seeing it in a context which illuminates its aesthetic value, such as another woman's home.

Furniture in the front room was 'cherished for the future' by being covered over with home-made and handed down lace crocheted mats. Covering also included clear plastic over sofa upholstery or the 'runway' / passage carpet, a style from the US, which was in vogue from the 1970s when travel in the Diaspora became less expensive and relatives and friends exchanged domestic aesthetics. It was intended to prolong the upholstery's life, but would often stick to skin, ironically making it uncomfortable to sit on. The three-piece suite was either 'leatherette' or upholstered fabric with floral patterns on a maroon background. Victorian gentlemen used Macassar hair oil and to prevent their heads from soiling sofas, anti-Macassars made from matching patterned cloth or lace pieces were put on sofa backs and arms and are now called simply chair backs. Women often knitted thread with a hooked needle to create crochet dollies and though patterns were shared, the intricate designs, colours and innovative shapes were always unique to the individual maker with the added effect of being starched and ironed. My mother found a new method for making doilies from a friend, which involved weaving strands of luminous coloured synthetic wool into a grid and then cutting the knotted junctions to bring up a delicate fluffy effect. She bought for the front room using savings or making down payments otherwise known as hire purchase (h.p.). Green Shield stamps were collected in the hundreds if not thousands and were used in exchange for goods that were chosen from catalogues. Goods were also ordered from catalogues such as Littlewoods and Great Universal.

Crocheting had been a cottage industry in late nineteenth-century Europe and was practised along with seam-stressing and garment making as the 'proper training' for women as part of a wider Victorian puritanical ethos. In a colonial context, missionaries taught crochet as well as knitting and sewing in Africa, the islands of the Azores, China and the 'West Indies'. Colonial education for native women was rudimentary and limited and for those whose parents could not afford to send their daughters onto further education, training in sewing, domestic science and crochet became a valid alternative vocation.

In the Caribbean, the Dorcas Club (based in the local church) was used to share the skills of sewing, dressmaking, knitting and crochet, as well as to train the younger women of the next generation. Like the social settings in which quilting was produced in the United States, the Dorcas Club allowed the women to share their skills, and also offer mutual support in an environment that could sometimes be hostile to the newcomers in what was regarded as the Mother Country.³

During the era of post-war migration to Britain crocheting was largely discontinued in England, though black women revived these skills using it entrepreneurially to supplement their income. In the dressing and maintenance of the front room, crochet became a symbol of black women's domestic cultural



Reinforced cardboard suitcases, known as 'grips', were a common form of luggage for West Indian migrants arriving in England. They were typically kept on top of the wardrobe and used to store cherished things, such as photographs and mementos of 'back home'. © John Hammond.

production and is a counter to the representation of black women as de-feminised and servile domestics. On a subliminal level, crocheting signifies a 'creolised' reconstruction of womanhood in response to the hegemonic construction of the black subject in the domestic domain.

Long hollow blown-glass fish with iridescent paint inside; smoked glass bowls of plastic fruits or fibre optic table lamps, bubble lamps; glass vases of artificial or plastic flowers, were often placed on crochet to enhance the lavishness of their decorative appearance. Ornaments were expensive and so creating a sense of opulence in the front room required ingenuity such as artificial flowers made from recycled stockings, metal coat hangers and food colourings, or stitching carpet remnants together to make a unique patchwork carpet.

The exterior decoration of a West Indian home would often give a sense of the interior. The brickwork might be covered with pebbledash or painted in tropical colours with the pointing outlined in white. The gate and front wall were sometimes similarly covered. Perhaps there were garden ornaments such as ceramic animals, and potted plants and flowers adorning windowsills and hanging from the porch. Covering up in the front room extended to windows draped by elaborate lace net curtains and pleated curtains of rich fabrics and colours were gathered in the middle like the opening of a stage show. Curtains also maintained privacy, while visitors and guests could be spotted coming up the road. At Easter and Christmas 'Spring Cleaning' was a cleansing ritual of renewal throughout the home. Curtains were taken down, washed and replaced. They announced respectability and decency; showing the best side of the curtains was in bad taste because facing outwards meant 'dressing up the street' or 'just for show', as if to cover up what the home did not have. This impression management or 'good grooming' included smell, and a 'proper' fragrance in the front room would come from a can of air freshener even though it may have been used to mask the smell of the paraffin heater or Windolene from freshly cleaned windows.

'Back in the day', winters seemed to be harsher and a painfully haunting memory of that time is the paraffin heater. As the eldest child, it was my task



The blown-glass fish was produced in Italy and popular in many West Indian and British front rooms and is now a collectable retro ornament. © John Hammond.



A vase of artificial flowers was a typical adornment displayed in the front room because they lasted forever. It would usually be placed on a homemade colourful crocheted doily that was sometimes iron-starched to enhance its intricate folds. © John Hammond.

to take a five-gallon plastic container to the local petrol station and ‘punch’ money for either pink or blue paraffin (blue paraffin tended not to smoke) and then struggle home with a full container in the cold. It was poured carefully into the heater via a funnel and if it spilt, the acrid smell was virtually impossible to remove. A cotton wick was lit and adjusted for the required blue flame; otherwise it gave off black toxic fumes. The paraffin heater was versatile: it provided much needed heating and was also used to heat up implements such as the hot iron comb used by many women to straighten their hair. In school, we knew which girls had used a hot comb the night before, because their hair would be shiny and stiff or the back of their necks had burns. We also knew who still had to use a paraffin heater because their clothes reeked of paraffin. Many children burnt themselves



Paraffin heaters were still in regular use in the 1970s in spite of the acrid fumes given off and their obvious dangers. © Dave Lewis.

on paraffin heaters, drawn to their warmth or fascinated by their power and this cheap form of domestic heating caused many fatal fires.

The sensorial landscape of the West Indian front room also extends to taste in terms of the food dishes and drinks that were consumed on special occasions in that 'special room'. While rum and spirits were the iconic alcoholic drinks favoured by many West Indian men, women usually preferred Babycham, Cherry B or Stones Ginger Wine. There were also homemade beverages such as punches made with condensed milk and spices, known as 'milk & stout' or 'Guinness punch', or used pineapple or carrot; seaweed was used to make 'Irish Moss'. Stem ginger was used to make ginger beer, Mauby bark for 'Mauby' and the hibiscus flower was soaked and drained to make 'sorrel', which was drunk at Christmas. For an added kick, a bit of rum was mixed in. Meals were not normally eaten in the front room, but Christmas Black Cake might be offered, which was made with minced fruit soaked in rum and black wine. For connoisseurs the quality of Black Cake depended on its moisture and how well and for how long the minced fruit had been soaked, sometimes for up to a year. Other snacks included coconut drops or coconut tart, sweet potato pudding and the obligatory peanuts. The sensorial landscape of the West Indian front room is an important aspect of a migrant aesthetic that, by observing, hearing, tasting and inhaling on many streets throughout the African Diaspora goes beyond the domestic interior. This could be the thumping bass from Ragga heard in Brooklyn, New York or the smell of freshly baked Jamaican Patties in Ridley Road Market in Hackney, London. While space prevents a study of the migrant sensorial realm beyond the domestic interior in this essay, it is evident that it requires further study and research.

West Indian migrants were often not welcome in English run churches and consequently they founded their own churches or used the front room as a space to hold bible and prayer meetings. The front room became a site where West Indians expressed their religiosity through pictures, homilies and ornaments. In the wider Diaspora, such as The Netherlands, the contemporary living room was used to create private altars of spiritual and religious devotion associated with the African syncretic religions such as Winti from Suriname and Santeria from the Antilles and Cuba.⁴

Religious prints depicting the life of Jesus Christ were *de rigueur* and classic amongst them was *The Last Supper*. Homilies on plaques, plates and scrolls had biblical quotes such as Psalm 23, The Lord is My Shepherd, or phrases such as, 'Jesus is the Head of this Home'. They were good luck charms in a home aware of demonised African-based religions such as Voodoo, Pocomania and Santeria. Juxtaposed beside them might be 'Tina', by J.H. Lynch, a print of a woman staring provocatively, with lips slightly parted and bare shouldered. After the Second World War, shops like Woolworths sold large numbers of these colourful and sentimental or 'exotic' prints such as the pseudo-surrealist 'Wings of Love', by Stephen Pearson, or 'The Hay Wain', by John Constable. They were affordable and livened up the homes of a population fed-up with austerity. Many



Religious prints such as *The Last Supper* featured prominently in many West Indian front rooms.
© Dave Lewis.

West Indians adopted this style of English prints for similar reasons, but they put them together with other things, in different ways than would be found in English working-class front rooms.

Souvenirs from trips to seaside towns such as Margate, Blackpool, and Great Yarmouth collected by predominantly female black church congregations, projected the image of a seasoned traveller. Decorative plates, straw bags and ornaments with the name of an island painted, stitched or embossed, denoted a sophisticated worldliness, even though it may have been brought back by a friend. The black velvet wall scroll (it was actually made from velour not velvet) with a tourist map of a Caribbean island were reminders of 'back home' and embodied a sense of pride and belonging. [See front cover of this issue.] This was later replaced by flat, varnished wooden clocks carved in the shape of the same island. When Cassius Clay changed his name to Muhammad Ali, he symbolised the popularisation of black figures from the civil rights and black power movements. His portrait would be framed and captioned just like Dr. Martin Luther King and his family. All these juxtapositions were usually mounted on floral patterned wallpaper reminiscent of the tropical vegetation in the Caribbean, though the really sophisticated look was baroque, velvet flock wall-coverings in maroon. In the Caribbean, there was not much demand for wallpaper but in homes of a lower income, walls of front room/living room spaces might be covered with newspaper and magazine clippings. Colourful consumer magazines would also be popular,

because apart from bringing colour into the living room, the commodities and subjects represented could provide a glamorous ideal to aspire to.

Some have argued that the front room was dressed by women and used by men. The front room was a convenient space for a christening or wedding reception, party or funeral wake. It was common for a coffin to be opened for viewing in the front room before it went off to the church and burial. In fact, as post-war black settlers were often excluded from pubs and clubs, they would entertain themselves at home. They came round and played dominoes, joked and caught up on news from 'back home' in the front room, and held the first blues parties or 'Shebeens' where the mother of the home sold homemade food and drinks. Music provided a means of spiritual escape and memories of 'back home', and the 'Blue-Spot'



The 'Blue Spot' radiogram (named after its German manufacturer, Blaupunkt) provided music and entertainment at home at a time when many West Indian migrants were unwelcome at, or even excluded from, many pubs and clubs. © John Hammond.

(after popular models made by the German manufacturer Blaupunkt) radiogram therefore held pride of place in the front room. A wooden and cloth panelled cabinet housed a radio and record player which was a mechanism that could play several 7-inch records consecutively, as the needle armature's movement regulated what was dropped and played. Rock 'n' roll, pop, ska, calypso or soul was played for a party or social gathering, though reggae or 'buff buff music' was seen as 'devil music' and therefore frowned upon because of its association with



The drinks cabinet took pride of place in the front room with glass shelves neatly filled with rows of shining, gold-rimmed glasses that were rarely used, though they provided a sense of achievement.
© John Nelligan.

Rastafari. Sundays were reserved for the country & western crooner, Jim Reeves, and other religious inspired music.

Known as ‘Gentleman Jim’, Jim Reeves recorded over 400 songs, ‘from traditional Country to pop, from Afrikaans folk songs to international standards, from novelty numbers to duets, from narrations to secular songs, from seasonal offerings to waltzes, from his own big hits to his covers of the hits of others’ (Morewood). *From a Jack to a King* was a number one hit in South Africa, and after his premature death in a plane crash in 1964, the release of *Distant Drums* and other reworked demos and studio cuts, gave him posthumous cult status, culminating in duet successes with Patsy Cline and Deborah Allen in the 1980s. It is a myth that Jim Reeves was reappropriated just by the ‘older generation’ as he is still popular across the African Diaspora today. The reason lies not so much in the style of his ‘silky smooth’ ballads, but their content. ‘Gentleman Jim’ sang about transcending the trials and tribulations of everyday life in recurring themes of loneliness, love, infidelity and loss. Therefore, it didn’t matter that he toured South Africa at the height of Apartheid, because the lyrics of Jim Reeves’ songs and other artists of the country & western genre, echo the hymns, spirituals and gospel of the black Christian Church, which sang of the ‘intense desire and yearning to transcend the misery of oppression’ (Mercer & Julien 199).

Regardless of how late you came in from ‘raving’ the night before, you had to be ready to go to church in the morning. With its cleaning taking place on



The drinks trolley with the plastic pineapple ice bucket would hold a range of brand name drinks such as Baby's Breath and Wray & Nephew white rum in readiness for unexpected visitors. © John Nelligan.

a Saturday, the front room came alive on a Sunday. Children were to be seen and not heard and you were not allowed in the front room if 'big people' were chatting. Peeping through the keyhole and eavesdropping behind the door, your mum would call you in to meet a stranger who knew you and would tell you how big you had got. They would then moan about or show off about their children as if you were invisible. The front room was for chatting 'commess' (gossip) about the scandals, secrets and stories of people they knew in England and back home: "You hear Miss Smart die?" "Sugar?" (Diabetes) "Pressure as well" (high blood pressure). You then became the waiter, bringing over the drinks trolley with the plastic pineapple ice bucket, though you were not allowed to touch the drinks cabinet to get any glasses. Mum owned it, so she opened it. With glass door and shelves and possibly a light inside, the drinks cabinet had no other function than to store and display rarely used lavish glass and chinaware. The side panelling was invariably decorative, sometimes with buttoned cloth material or had a clock on top that rarely kept the right time.

GROOMING AND DRESSING OF THE FRONT ROOM

Some post-war black settlers had their black and white passport photos enlarged, colour painted and proudly displayed in their front rooms. A yellowish brown seemed to be a flesh tone paint of choice in this practice of 'touching-up' portraits, regardless of the complexion of the subject. The palette of pigments signify how they imagined themselves and desired to be seen; ethnically inscribed with a valorised tilt towards whiteness as a legacy of a racial hierarchy based on a 'pigmentocracy' instituted in plantation societies. This functioned as an ideological basis for status ascription, where European elements both physical and cultural were positively valorised as attributes enabling upward social mobility. On this 'ethnic scale', social status was not simply determined by socioeconomic factors such as wealth, income, education and marriage, but also less easily changed elements of status symbolism such as the shape of one's nose, the shade of one's blackness or the texture of one's hair (Mercer 1994 103).

What has been overlooked are the different specifically gendered ways race domination expresses itself in the lives of men and women. For instance, the practical realities of black hair maintenance, in terms of how appearance is gendered, meant that black women had more concerns over how their hair looked than men.⁵

Making similar links between hair straightening and dignity, many black women taught their daughters the importance of hair straightening as nothing more than good grooming. (Craig 403)

In the dressing and maintenance of the front room, it was women who were judged on the basis of 'good grooming' in the domestic domain. Washing, cleaning and cooking rice and peas, amongst other Caribbean dishes, were other elements of 'good grooming'. These practices, along with crocheting and 'Spring Cleaning'

rituals, formed part of the moral code which fused religion, hygiene and the Protestant Work ethic: 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' and 'By the sweat of your brow, thou shall eat bread'. This ethos would find expression aesthetically in the presentation of the home and self where order meant beauty.

This was not a simple imitation of white bias and ideals of beauty, but rather the consequences of having to negotiate dominant ideologies and regimes of power that objectified race in the realm of the domestic. As Anne McClintock points out, the domestic was a construction in colonialism to maintain hegemony over the division of labour at home and the subordinate 'Other' abroad. In the representation of the domestic and popular culture, the black subject has either been erased or stereotyped as an object of servitude, caricature, fear and desire. The first advertisements for soap for instance, used the ethnic signifier of skin colour to depict black people as unclean and dirty, which was a code for savage and uncivilised. Inscribed in the use of soap, was the maintenance of Christian civilised values, as an antidote to moral chaos and disorder (McClintock 515).

Black women did not exist in the colour supplement advertising of kitchen and other domestic commodities. Their (un)-domestic representation in popular culture was that of the 'black mama' of Aunt Jemina pancakes and other exoticised



This leatherette (imitation leather) settee has lace chair backs or Antimacassars which were traditionally used to prevent soiling from the Macassar hair oil used by Victorian gentlemen. Such settees were sometimes plastic covered to prolong the upholstery's life, but it tended to stick to skin and ironically it made the settee uncomfortable to sit on. © Michael McMillan.

objects in the colonial construction of domesticity (McClintock 516). This trope has been critically challenged by many black women artists such as photographer Maxine Walker's series of images, *Auntie Linda's Front Room 1 & 2* (1987) that restages the familiar terrain of the Sunday colour supplements. Walker's starting point is to claim 'a woman's room of her own' — alluding to Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own* as a means of interrogating the photographic document which frames individual identity and experience in terms of material objectivity. The series plays with human presence, just as with the regular supplement feature the documentary image claims to represent all that makes the subject individual by putting under public scrutiny the material evidence of their private life. Walker though, is suggesting that material reality remains incoherent and ambivalent as the sum of individual fragments until they are invested with specific and subjective meaning. With Auntie Linda's presence, objects of functional utility and ornamental decoration which surround her as she sits on the edge of her settee, hands calmly placed together on her lap, suggest an order and coherence of her own. The image is transformed from reality into representation through the layering upon layering of memories and experiences as fragments, resisting any complete interpretation. Ultimately the framing excludes as much as it contains (Tawadros 90).

WHEN THE TELEVISION ARRIVED

It was common for there to be only one telephone in a street during the late 1960s and early 1970s and neighbours would often share it. Calls were still expensive in post-war Britain, so even with a telephone in the home, it remained in the front room where it could be monitored. The arrival of televisions in the home symbolised the changing nature of the front room as children grew up and it became a communal living room. Before colour television, a transparent green plastic covering could be stuck onto black and white television screens, though all the 'colours' were green. The family gathered to watch such sitcoms as *The Fosters*, which attempted to reassure viewers that black families in sitcoms were just as 'normal' as white ones. Television also marked a shift in the way the second generation born and/or educated in England were beginning to see themselves and therefore what the front room meant to them. Two seminal events on television symbolise this moment. The first was the riot/uprising/revolt at the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976 and its representation on television. The second was the screening of the American-produced epic slave drama, *Roots*, which the whole family saw and felt in the front room. These two events gave expression to what had been difficult to articulate for the second generation for some time.

Parents had worked hard to acquire and 'put down' their 'nice things' in the front room and these were not easily parted with. They packed the front room like a museum of archived memories and its close arrangement was a metaphor for the closeness of the extended family and community and increasing complexity of their lives. As their children became parents and grandparents themselves, their

response to the front room was much more ambivalent. They saw it as 'hoarding' for a better tomorrow that never came: deferred dreams.

The legacy of the front room lies in how, for instance, grown-up daughters have negotiated and imposed their own consumer desires on their mothers' front rooms, and how they have unconsciously imitated their mothers' styles, tastes and practices in the making of their own homes. In a post-colonial context, the front room deserves further study because it raises questions about modernity and migrant aesthetics, the process of decolonisation and the subjective desire to redefine oneself through material culture in the home.

NOTES

- ¹ In Holland, *The West Indian Front Room* became *Van Huis Uit: The Living Room of Migrants in The Netherlands* (Imagine IC, Amsterdam January–May 2007 & OBT Central Library, Tilburg May–August 2007 re-titled as *That's the Way We Do It!*). *The West Indian Front Room* is also the basis of a BBC4 Documentary, *Tales from the Front Room*.
- ² Notes from conversations with the Canadian Art Historian/Curator, Francine Freeman, 2005. The emotional realm of the senses is very much under investigation at present. See for example, Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*.
- ³ Notes from Rose Sinclair's PhD research into crochet, gender and race, Goldsmiths College, London, 2006.
- ⁴ In the *Van Huis Uit* living room installation in The Netherlands (2007), there are various altars of spiritual and religious devotion which feature Winti (Suriname), Santeria (Antilles), Hindu (Hindus from Suriname) associations.
- ⁵ In the politics of black hair styling, straightening has been interpreted as ideologically imitating a white-bias conception of beauty as opposed to a 'natural' counter-hegemonic notion of blackness. Kobena Mercer questions hair straightening as simply a recycling of binary opposition between black and white in its imitation of white-bias, but sees it rather a negotiation between ethnic signifiers in the syncretic process of incorporating other cultural motifs.

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KARINA SMITH

Resisting the ‘Cancer of Silence’: The Formation of Sistren’s ‘Feminist Democracy’

Writing in the 1980s, Honor Ford-Smith, the then Artistic Director of Sistren, described Sistren Theatre Collective’s theatre productions and outreach work as attempting to ‘resist’ the ‘cancer of silence’ that was closing down the spaces in Jamaican society in which cultural work develops. The ‘cancer of silence’ was, according to Ford-Smith, embodied in Jamaica-US relations and the IMF Structural Adjustment Program, both of which brought about decreased support for cultural production, particularly that which critiqued local and global hegemonies. Ford-Smith was also reflecting on the change in political climate engendered by Edward Seaga’s Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) in the 1980s compared with that of the Michael Manley led People’s National Party (PNP) of the 1970s. Although Obika Gray points out that both political parties were expediently appropriating ‘the “nation language” of downtrodden groups’ (74) in their political campaigns, under Manley’s democratic socialist government cultural workers were encouraged to experiment with theatrical forms and to create theatre around social issues as an integral part of the process of decolonisation (I will call the spaces that were created for such experimentation ‘aesthetic’ spaces, to use Augusto Boal’s terminology¹). These ‘aesthetic spaces’, however, were perceived as threatening to the Seaga regime and, as a result, it attempted to silence oppositional voices within the society. However, Anthony Payne reports that ‘[t]he intense politicisation of the Manley period had created a more aware public opinion in Jamaica, and popular aspirations for social justice, inspired by the PNP’s socialism, were not extinguished but were re-directed at the JLP’ (89).

The Seaga government’s fostering of closer ties with the United States brought about the suppression of dissident voices within Jamaican society, many of whom had either been supporters of Manley’s socialist experiment and/or ‘cultural agents’² involved in developing grassroots cultural organisations. Re-colonisation, in the form of external and internal neo-colonialism, stifled the emergence of popular movements and stymied the aspirations of disadvantaged groups working for the alleviation of poverty through community decision-making processes. Community cultural organisations collapsed from lack of funding or were censored and/or harassed by the new regime. The members of Sistren, who were working as street cleaners in a PNP-funded unemployment

alleviation program (called the Impact Program), found themselves unemployed and 'homeless' after the Seaga government cancelled the Program and banned them from using the Cultural Training Centre's facilities at the Jamaica School of Drama. Justifying their actions, the JLP claimed that 'only PNP partisans were employed in what they saw as an essentially unproductive exercise' (Wilson 43). By 1980, the members of Sistren were no longer working as street cleaners, but had been retrained to work as teachers' aides. Working in schools had a positive effect on their respective sense of self and enabled them to improve their educational skills.

Further, the political climate engendered by the JLP empowered ultra-conservatives within the society. The murder of Mikey Smith, Dub poet and cultural worker, in 1983 is a case in point. Ford-Smith suggests that Smith's death was indicative of 'an unnamed crisis' affecting cultural workers in the Caribbean: 'Its effects are felt in death ... in harassment, in migration and/or long periods of temporary exile. It is felt in an inability to speak truthfully about what is happening in the society and a crippling tendency to repeat old formulas over and over again' (n.d. 4). Mikey Smith described his own poetry as political, but suggested that he was not 'sectarian inna my view. Me lick out gainst baldhead, PNP, JLP, any one of them P-deh' (40). Artists with an acute sense of social injustice, such as Smith, have suffered the contradiction of being courted by overseas markets at the same time as they are persecuted for political protest within their own countries. Smith had toured many countries throughout the world, and was preparing to tour Britain at the time of his murder (Morris 40). Smith is not the only artist to die tragically for his criticism of political wrongdoing. Gordon Rohlehr lists numerous artists and activists who have been persecuted and/or murdered for their critique of Caribbean societies. He points out that the State could not afford to foster these voices, dependent as it was upon tourism and US economic assistance: 'Where necessary, they imprisoned or muzzled them, and under extreme circumstances, they assassinated the voice' (41–42).

In order to resist the 'cancer of silence', it is necessary to identify the processes of re-colonisation in the era of globalisation. In Jamaica, the 'economic crisis' resulted in increased unemployment, the devaluation of the currency, the elimination of government subsidies to farmers, decreased union involvement, and an increase in the number of women working in the informal sector (Safa and Antrobus 1992; Levitt 2005). In the face of economic crises such as these, cultural workers are ambivalent about the form of resistance they should adopt. Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña writes: 'In this unprecedented "post-democratic era" ... civic, human, and labour rights, education, and art are perceived as expendable budget items, minor privileges, and nostalgic concerns' (11). In the era of globalisation, funding for cultural production is rarely offered by the State; cultural workers must seek financial support from organisations that are often external to their situation. This is because 'radical' performance,

that is 'acts that question or re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power' (Cohen-Cruz 1), has the potential to bring about social change. The available sources of funding for such cultural production are limited and often involve negotiating grants with development agencies or marketing cultural work in the global capitalist marketplace (Ford-Smith n.d. 26). Needless to say, some funding sources have the potential to compromise and depoliticise dissident voices. Although both scenarios present ethical dilemmas for cultural workers, the importance of survival has taken priority over political standpoints. Some cultural workers accept funding from development agencies, as Eugene van Erven points out, with the attitude that the money is global capitalist profit and should be used to finance subversive activities. These groups deliberately tailor their funding applications to meet development agency requirements and to justify their actions by claiming that development agencies are 'representatives of the very imperialist cultures that created colonies in the first place and continue to benefit from neocolonialism now' (232). Jo Rowlands also asserts that groups that apply for Women In Development funding are equally capable of 'identify[ing] trends in funding criteria, and will strategically or even cynically, include in funding applications the wordings necessary to obtain funding approval' (28). Even Honor Ford-Smith admits that the popularity of Women in Development projects in the late 1970s provided 'a loophole through which [Sistren] could slip to avoid extinction' (1989 59). Others attempt to escape the repressive forces in their societies by participating in the globalisation of cultural production. In many societies, surviving on the earnings from one's cultural production is almost impossible; the profitable marketplace for such products exists in the North. This presents a dilemma for cultural workers as the messages embedded in their cultural production are targeted at local audiences, yet financial rewards must be sought further afield.

Sistren's cultural work in Jamaica during the 1980s was at the forefront of feminist anti-globalisation activism in the Caribbean region and, at the same time, it was adversely impacted by the forces of globalisation (Green 2004; 2006). In order to survive, Sistren applied for development agency funding which financed the group's activities throughout the 1980s; however, the funding caused Sistren internal problems leading it to the brink of collapse in recent years. Until the 1980s, Sistren had been operating mainly as a consciousness-raising group which theatricalised the major themes of its discussions. The prospect of long-term unemployment for Sistren members, and the effects of IMF Structural Adjustment programs on Jamaican women in general, prompted Sistren to put its consciousness-raising into practice on a broader front. This is not to suggest, however that Sistren's work lost its political edge. On the contrary, it became 'fervently political' (Wilson 44), but was able to achieve political 'neutrality' within Jamaica by securing aid agency funding under the guise of Women in Development.

Despite the company's efforts to raise their own funds through community activities, such as car washes and jam drives (Ford-Smith 1997b 226–27), development agency funding proved to be more reliable and consistent. In return, development agencies expected Sistren to establish a business enterprise in order to become self-sufficient. Sistren Textiles, inspired by the screen printed costumes that were designed for the group's second major production, *Nana Yah*, satisfied development agency requirements. Sistren's transformation under the guise of Women in Development allowed the company to, firstly, critique the status of women in Jamaican society and, secondly, conduct consciousness-raising workshops with groups of women throughout the island. Given Jamaica's political climate in the 1980s, it was imperative for Sistren to strengthen its base of support, a task that necessitated fostering transnational alliances. Hence the focus of the group's work shifted from making plays to conducting community development workshops.

Sharon Green has published two recent articles on Sistren's work, in 2004 and 2006 respectively, in which she discusses the impact of globalisation on Sistren's community theatre work. Her main argument is that 'the challenges posed by globalisation have eroded the original function of Sistren's cultural practice as a source of empowerment for poor Jamaican women' by looking to Sistren's 'international connections' as the reason the group's work changed in the Jamaican context (2006 113). While Green mentions development agency funding and the international women's movement as two of the main players shaping Sistren's work on the international scene, she does not go into any detail about Sistren's transformation from a theatre co-operative to a Women and Development non-government organisation; a transformation intrinsically linked to the onset of late global capitalism and the modernisation agendas of international aid donors.

In this essay, I will look at Sistren's transformation into a 'feminist democracy', a term coined by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1997) in the introduction to their edited collection *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, in order to discuss the way in which Sistren both resisted and complied with the processes of globalisation. Feminist democracies are born out of the decolonisation movement and respond to the State's treatment of women; they provide a space for questioning naturalised hierarchies in society with the aim of transforming relationships between people through collective organisation. Within feminist democracies, agency is theorised differently so that self-determination becomes a reality; alternatives are proposed to bring about social change; and transnational alliances are fostered (xxviii–xxix). By looking at the criteria outlined by Alexander and Mohanty, I will discuss the way in which Sistren's work reflects on, protests against, intervenes in, but is ultimately co-opted by, the process of globalisation. I will also investigate the ways in which Sistren's cultural work and organisational structure to some extent complicate and contest the concept of 'feminist democracy'.

WOMEN AND THE STATE

From 1980 onwards, Sistren's theatrical productions became increasingly political in orientation, and particularly analysed the treatment of women by the 'apparatus of government'. Productions and workshop programs were devised around the following issues: the IMF Structural Adjustment Program; the care of the aged and infirm; unionisation; and the sexual division of labour.

In the Seaga era, Sistren members' decisions on projects that the company should undertake became more focused on political events, economic trends, and social structures. Therefore the company placed greater emphasis on developing its workshop program, which reached more women — and particularly more working-class women — while the company's productions were effective in bringing working-class women's concerns to the attention of middle-class Jamaicans; the company's importance as a grassroots organisation was in its ability to reach even the poorest women in Jamaican society through its community outreach program. The phrase 'the personal is political' is particularly apposite for describing Sistren's approach in the 1980s. Sistren's work focused on real life experiences of social injustice, problems facing working women, the roles women have played in union organising, feminist mobilisation and protests against inequality. Sistren members used their personal testimonies to empower groups of women in diverse situations. A workshop conducted in a women's prison, for example, was particularly effective, according to Ford-Smith, because of the use of personal testimony. One Sistren member described her experience of being intimidated by a man to hide stolen goods, which sparked a series of testimonies among the inmates that highlighted a commonality of experience: 'It was a testimony about oppression and the more women joined in, the louder the protest' (nd 124).

A particularly effective series of workshops conducted with women working in Jamaica's sugar industry has fortunately been well documented on video. Joan French, a school teacher, union organiser and middle-class Sistren member, was the co-ordinator of the workshop program at this time, and the methodology Sistren members employed developed out of her 'contribution to the critical content of our educational strategy' (Ford-Smith 1997b 222). The company divided into two workshop teams: one working with the sugar workers and the other with middle-and working-class urban women. The rural team visited Sugar Town, a multi-national-owned sugar plantation situated in the parish of Clarendon, in which many women work planting and harvesting sugar cane. In 1982, the year in which Sistren members began the workshop program, the female sugar workers were earning JA \$9.60 per day for their labour. Sistren members conducted interviews with the sugar workers, which were filmed for the group's subsequent video production titled *Sweet Sugar Rage*. The video begins by juxtaposing the lives of rural and urban women. The workshop conducted with the sugar workers further enhanced these similarities. Warm-up games and songs were used to develop trust between the women. This was followed by the

performance of an excerpt from Sistren's play, *Domesticks*, in which the working conditions for female domestic workers is delineated. To begin the performance, Sistren members marched into the space chanting 'A-sugar, a-sugar' which was used as a framing device to connect the lives of the sugar workers to those of the domestic helpers. Chairs were arranged in a semi-circle on which the actors sat during the performance. Sistren member Bev Hanson moved into the centre of the space to mime the domestic chore of ironing while singing a folk song which described the domestic duties women are required to perform. An excerpt from Sistren's play, *Domesticks*, followed and this sparked a discussion with the sugar workers concerning the nature of women's oppression (Sistren Theatre Collective 1986).

Much of Sistren's work in the sugar belt involved recording the testimonies of the sugar workers. In the interviews the women describe their lives as revolving around domestic duties, children and the physically demanding work on the sugar plantation. The conditions under which the women worked were extremely poor. Not only did they have to purchase their own tools in order to perform their duties, but the fertilisers used to treat the cane burnt their hands, legs and arms. The interviews with the female sugar workers are juxtaposed with interviews with the male supervisor who also happened to be the union representative. When asked if he felt the women were paid adequately for their labour, he said he believed so. He also pointed out that the women were not forced to work on the plantation, and that the adverse affect of the fertiliser was not an important issue as some women were affected more than others. The inequalities endured by women workers in the sugar belt were further exemplified in the testimony of Miss Iris Armstrong, who was promoted to a supervisory position as a result of an illness that prevented her from working in the fields. Not only was she refused the same rate of pay as her male counterparts, she was also denied the same working conditions. The male supervisors were able to ride on mules whereas she had to walk in the hot sun. Further, none of the women working on the estate was given the opportunity to learn how to drive the tractor or operate any of the machines thus ensuring their position at the bottom of the plantation hierarchy (Sistren Theatre Collective 1986). The testimonies pointed up the sexual division of labour on sugar plantations that began in 1780 'with the introduction of machines into farming, when men and not women were forced to use the new technology. With emancipation ... men came increasingly to occupy positions in the sugar factories' (Osirim 48). The sugar industry, as Nettleford points out, 'remains ... a symbol of servitude for social-conscious advocates of change...' (1972 142), and this was made particularly evident in Sistren's workshops and subsequent theatrical production, *The Case of Miss Iris Armstrong*.

Sistren's workshop teams discussed the issues arising from the sugar workers' testimonies. They then created the play which was used to educate urban working- and middle-class women in Kingston about the problems faced by the sugar workers. *The Case of Miss Iris Armstrong* was first performed in

a hall in front of workshop participants. Some bags of sugar demarcated the performance space. Sistren members entered the stage by collectively chanting whilst miming work on the plantation. In the same vein as Sistren's previous productions, group members played the male characters by donning fake beards and caricaturing male physicality and verbal expressions. The play depicts the preferential treatment given to men on the plantation. Miss Iris is portrayed fighting for equal pay with the help of Brother Mawga, a male supervisor on the plantation. The male management are characterised by their drunkenness and sexism towards the female sugar workers. The point in the discussion when Iris agrees to accept \$12 per day despite the rate of pay for men being \$15 per day is where the audience is invited to find solutions to her problem. The workshop participants were divided into groups in which they discussed the issues raised in the play. One participant suggested that Iris should ask the pastor of her church to confront the plantation management. This was then improvised. Another solution was to mobilise other sugar workers to support Miss Iris' case. In the discussion following the improvisations, working-class urban women suggested that their middle-class counterparts needed to join their struggle otherwise social change was unlikely to occur (Sistren Theatre Collective 1986).

The workshops, filmed and replayed for the women in the sugar belt, reaffirmed for the participants the need to establish a women's organisation. Joan French reports that thirty of the women involved in the workshops expressed interest in joining the organisation. In subsequent workshops these women were asked to identify an issue that they could act upon successfully, and repair to the community's water pump was identified. At the beginning of the workshop, Sistren members played the game, 'Machines' as a warm-up exercise, using their bodies to simulate a sewing machine, which prompted a discussion about men's and women's labour. The next stage involved a series of improvisations around the crises that ensued from the water shortage. The final stage in the workshops involved role-playing the discussion with the local councillor regarding the water pump. The sugar workers then met with the councillor who arranged to have a more regular water supply delivered to the community whilst the pump was being repaired (French 3).

While Green argues that the project with the sugar workers 'epitomises Sistren's goals: to empower individuals and communities to take action to improve their lives' (2004 480), Ford-Smith writes that Sistren members voted to discontinue the collective's group building project 'because of the intense difficulty of providing organisational support for such work' (1997 222). Ironically, the practicalities of responding to the State's treatment of women were made difficult by the nature of project-to-project development funding, sometimes given by organisations with a feminist focus, which did not make follow-up work with communities viable. As Laurell Fletcher Gayle argues in her 2006 Master of Business dissertation, '[t]he

overemphasis by donors on short-term projects ... is at the heart of the financial challenges faced by the organisation' (71).

COLLECTIVE ORGANISATION

As I have mentioned previously, Sistren members were profoundly affected by the change in political climate in the 1980s. The prospect of long-term unemployment prompted members of the group to transform the co-operative into a professional theatre collective and Women-in-Development NGO. In collectively organised theatre companies, all participants are equal, administrative tasks are shared, and decisions are voted upon by the group. Most collectives are leaderless, although there are many examples where leaders emerge and guide the other participants. In feminist theatre collectives, emphasis is placed on the therapeutic and political aspects of the creative process rather than the decisions themselves. By discussing personal experiences, and then theatricalising them within the collective, feminist collaborative theatre practice helped 'women to "see" their lives politically: to raise awareness of oppression and to encourage women's creativity' (Aston 2). Further, Alexander and Mohanty identify collective organisation and socialist principles as being fundamental to 'feminist democracy': they enable 'understanding socioeconomic, ideological, cultural, and psychic hierarchies of rule, their interconnectedness, and their effects on disenfranchised people' (xxviii); through gaining such an understanding, 'an alternative vision of change' can be crafted (xxix).

Ford-Smith suggests that Sistren adopted collectivity because the group was influenced by the ethos of socialism and, therefore, felt it was 'the best and most democratic way of working at the time ... collectives were historically a means of opposing individualistic profit making strategies' (1997a). Further, Sistren's collective structure was a way of preserving the participatory decision-making models established by the Manley government (Payne 64) and was, therefore, a conscious political act. Sistren's collective model revolved around a General Meeting, in which decisions were made and policies established via consensus among the founding members of the company. Each Sistren member was given an opportunity to express her ideas and raise concerns at the meeting, and facilitation was based on a roster system so that all members could participate equally (Ford-Smith 1997b 236).

The collective structure adopted by Sistren in the late 1970s is, in many ways, Sistren's greatest and most difficult experiment. Relationships between people were changed through middle-and working-class women working together to achieve the same goals. However, tensions arose when collectivity masked differences of race and class. External pressures in the form of development agency funding demanded that 'formal' skills be given prominence. This, in turn, created a race and class divide which caused much bitterness between working-class and middle-class members alike. Ford-Smith (1997b) suggests that the middle-class members of Sistren did not openly acknowledge the imbalance of

power within the group or speak about their own needs as women because of the negative image of 'light-skinned' Jamaicans. The working-class women refused to allow any of the middle-class members, Ford-Smith excepted, to become official members of the company. According to Fletcher Gayle, '[t]his group had the power to determine who became a member and, so far, after almost thirty years, has not allowed anyone else to be so recognised' (52).

Sistren's 'feminist democracy', established in an era of democratic socialist idealism, was not as democratic as it appeared to outside observers of the group. Although reflection on the problems associated with collective organising as they were played out within Sistren brought about a sharper vision of social change in that it became clear that both middle and working-class women needed to speak to each other and to the wider society about the problems they were facing on a daily basis, there also arose the need to publicly address the imbalance of power that Jamaica's social stratification engenders rather than mask it behind the façade of collectivity. In 2006 Sistren's 'collective' model was still causing internal problems for the group. The working-class 'members' of the collective were 'not prepared to surrender ownership to a class of individuals who, in the Jamaican context, are regarded as "privileged" and always in control' (Fletcher Gayle 55).

AGENCY

Although Sistren has staged numerous theatrical productions, toured to many countries, and won prizes for their theatre and outreach work, the working-class members of the company claim that the organisation's major achievement 'lies not in its impact on the position of women in Jamaican society as a whole, but rather in what the organisation has been able to provide for its members' (Ford-Smith 1989 32). In their embryonic stage, Sistren used drama more for the purpose of self-reflection and self-empowerment than community outreach. Sharing their testimonies in the 'aesthetic space' made clear to Sistren members that their experiences of oppression were not isolated incidents; reality was demystified which, in turn, unified the women in the group. As Alexander and Mohanty point out, within 'feminist democracy' 'women do not imagine themselves as *victims* or *dependents* of governing structures but as agents of their own lives... And agency is anchored in the practice of thinking of oneself as part of feminist collectives and organisations' (xxviii [*italics in original*]).

The effectiveness of 'feminist democracy' can be seen in the activities of two groups of women about whom Sistren has created plays: textile workers and sugar workers. Sistren's first skit, *Downpression Get a Blow* (1977), depicted the conditions for women working in a multinational US-owned garment factory in which union organising was/is strongly discouraged. Ten years later, Ford-Smith reports that in Jamaica's Free Trade Zones

there is tremendous activity going on and where the women are organising themselves and are ... speaking out themselves about certain questions and issues. And that's a

very hopeful sign because it means that the U.S.'s sort of policy plan for the region has in a funny kind of way created the very conditions for resistance to that policy.

(1987 1)

Similarly, Sistren's workshop program with women in Sugar Town resulted in the establishment of a women's organisation that lobbied the local council to have the community's water pump repaired (French 3).

TRANSNATIONAL ALLIANCES

Sistren's activities in the 1980s could not have been achieved without the support of their transnational feminist alliances. In 1980, the Jamaican women's movement faltered and its demise could not have come at a more inopportune time. The impact of the IMF's austerity measures had created a situation in which women's issues took on greater urgency. The absence of a strong feminist voice to protest against the economic oppression of women prompted Sistren members to organise themselves into an active feminist organisation through which they could critique gender relations in Jamaican society without remaining faithful to political party agendas. Sistren members, many of whom were also the heads of households, were directly affected by both the change in political climate and the economic 'reforms' introduced by Manley and then continued by the Seaga government on behalf of the IMF. The international women's movement provided a safety net for Sistren members. From within the women's movement's protective embrace, particularly in conjunction with the United Nations focus on women's issues, Sistren could continue to critique the inequalities of race, gender, and class in Jamaican society. Peggy Antrobus, founding director of the Women and Development Unit (WAND), suggests that the United Nations Decade for Women created myriad opportunities for women in the Caribbean and made West Indian women more aware of patterns of oppression in the South; it 'opened a space for strategising across regional and national borders' (1). Sistren was one of the first organisations that the women's bureau assisted which in turn made it one of the first Jamaican Women in Development projects. WAND, from its inception, was funded by US development agencies, such as the Carnegie Corporation, proving to other Caribbean women's organisations that the concerns of women were attractive to funding agencies. WAND provided training and support for non-government organisations, such as Sistren, as well as initiating and implementing women's development projects throughout the region.

The international women's movement not only provided support for Sistren members, it also supplied a discursive framework that they could use to explain their activities to funding bodies and government officials. Alexander and Mohanty assert that 'feminist democracy needs some theorisation of transborder participatory democracy which is outside the purview of the imperial' (xxix). The international women's movement's involvement in pressuring the United Nations, the World Bank, and other development agencies to recognise women's needs gave rise to the discourse of Women in Development. Sistren's work fitted neatly into

this discursive framework and, in some ways, the company became indoctrinated by it. Sistren's projects between 1980 and 1988 all reflect the strategies inherent in development discourse: Sistren members' personal testimonies were used to achieve solidarity with men and women from similar backgrounds; the aesthetic space was described as a space for consciousness-raising; and their workshop program was used to 'empower' women to become leaders in their respective communities. Becoming one of the most important Women and Development non-government organisations in the region, however, brought a range of added pressures which the company, due to its rapid transformation, was never equipped to adequately cope with. Survival in the Seaga era required immediate action despite Sistren members' need for improved literacy and organisational skills.

CO-OPTION

Ironically, Sistren's increasing dependency on development agency funding in the 1980s — financial support that enabled it to survive the onslaught of globalisation — caused its demise throughout the 1990s (Nzegwu 2002). Development agencies expect returns on money provided, but ignore the internal stresses on small organisations, such as lack of training and resources. On the one hand, the company's decision to apply for development agency funding grants at such an early stage in its development, and the way it used the grants, enabled it to survive in the 1980s. However, on the other hand, the company has been used as living proof of development agency rhetoric and 'showcased' internationally to share its success story with development educators and/or audiences for whom Sistren's members' struggles may not have much meaning. Cheryl Ryman, who wrote an evaluation report of Sistren's work, suggests that Sistren's international tours took preference over their local performances and workshop schedule (During the 1980s, the group was funded to tour the Caribbean, Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada). 'All in all, their overseas constituency provided a very alluring and very satisfying environment personally and collectively' (25–26). The IMF SAP had created an economic environment in which Jamaican communities were struggling to provide health and educational services let alone supply resources for Sistren's workshops. Sistren's international constituency, on the other hand, had the money and interest to finance Sistren's tours. Lillian Foster notes that on one of Sistren's tours to Canada, '[p]eople were clamouring that the time was too short, they wanted us to stay' (48). Focusing on international tours, however, meant that Sistren members had to prepare themselves for presenting their work in front of relatively unknown audiences and modifying the language and iconography used in their productions. Rhonda Cobham and Honor Ford-Smith point out that 'many of the play's images are only read with difficulty by audiences beyond the Caribbean, or they may be reinterpreted devoid of their original social and political nuances' (xxxiii).

Ironically, Sistren member Rebecca Knowles points out that groups like Sistren can only work if the members are 'living in community — day to day,

hour to hour — then the group will keep together. If you're not living in the community, people don't know enough about you to make it work' (qtd in Di Cenzo & Bennett 92). Sistren members' personal testimonies, which at first underpinned their performances, have lost their currency and no longer reflect the position of poor women in Jamaican society. Interestingly, Rebecca Knowles is the only member of Sistren to have established a spin-off group. Teens-in-Action was formed following the gang rape and murder of a teenage girl in Knowles' community, Seaview Gardens, and, as a result, addresses the needs of teenage girls in ghetto areas:

Teens-in-Action offers the young women of Seaview a chance to deal with their problem creatively. In internal workshops they discuss the issues like sexual abuse, and communication between parents and children. Later they share their views with the Seaview community and other groups around Jamaica. Teens-in-Action are known for their drama representations in radio shows, and for their letters to the media.

(Ford-Smith 1991 12)

However, what appears to be a highly appropriate community in which Sistren members' skills and experiences could make an enormous difference is at risk of being co-opted by development agencies. Green notes that in 1996 development agencies were particularly interested in funding projects with a focus on youth (1999 180). Although Sistren has suffered many setbacks since its inception in 1977, the group is still surviving; in fact, it has recently moved to a new facility and has also launched its own website. It seems that Sistren, with the help of its funding bodies, has managed to change direction in order to make itself sustainable in Jamaican society. It is interesting in light of Green's remarks that Sistren's new 'objective' is 'to reduce and prevent inter-communal violence, specifically targeting youths and adolescents' (2007).

Sistren's dilemmas are not, of course, uncommon among self-help groups and popular/political theatre companies throughout the world. Those that have sought funding, whether it is from development agencies, corporate sponsors or even arts funding agencies, have had to compromise their ideals for the sake of financial support. Canadian popular theatre worker and academic Richard Paul Knowles describes his experience of writing a script for Mulgrave Road Theatre Company that included criticism of the corporate take-over of the local fish plant. On the first day of rehearsals for the show, *From Fogarty's Cove*, Knowles' criticisms were omitted from the script because the new owners of the fish plant had become the play's major corporate sponsors (110). Yolanda Brayles-Gonzales (1994) describes the impact of funding or 'mainstreaming' on El Teatro Campesino which, in the late 1960s, was a political theatre collective comprised of striking Mexican farm workers with Luis Valdez as its Artistic Director. As Brayles-Gonzales explains, by the late 1970s El Teatro Campesino's play *Zoot Suit* was adapted, first as a Broadway musical and then, for film, which was an attempt to widen its audience but ended up re-orienting the company's work towards the

mainstream. This led to the collapse of the collective as the prospect of individual stardom undermined the importance of group solidarity (173). Cobham and Ford-Smith, reflecting on the situation for Caribbean cultural workers, point out, with some sadness, that the 'benign neglect or active hostility' shown towards their work has led to 'a profound sense of alienation that manifests itself in', among other things, 'a sycophantic dependency on the approval of audiences and critical establishments beyond the Caribbean' (x).

In the 1980s, Sistren fought outside forces in order to remain active in Jamaican society by forming itself into a 'feminist democracy' that could resist (through feminist allegiances) the forms of oppression that became synonymous with the era of globalisation. Sistren's dependency on development agencies, however, has been the main factor in the group's decline over the last two decades. This is a situation that is particularly contradictory given that the company explores the affects of re-colonisation on Jamaican society in its theatre productions and workshops. Sistren's haste to secure financial support resulted in the company's failure to assess the potential damage of this type of assistance. While all forms of funding have strings attached and should be regarded with suspicion, it could be argued that financial assistance of any kind is worth pursuing as long as the goals for its use are absolutely clear. Otherwise funding bodies can apply pressure on the recipient group that has the potential to skew its initial aims and objectives. In the case of Sistren, funding dilemmas caused a 'cancer' to grow within the company which undermined its efforts to resist the 'silencing' forces in the wider society.

NOTES

- ¹ The 'aesthetic space' is a designated space for performance in which the personal becomes political within the frameworks of the theatrical. See *The Rainbow of Desire*, 1995.
- ² The term 'cultural agents' was used by the Manley government to describe cultural workers who would use their artistic or theatrical training with communities throughout Jamaica. See Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity The Case of Jamaica: An Essay in Cultural Dynamics*.

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Olive Senior

EMBROIDERY

The women of the family took tea all together except for Aunt Millie, Uncle Vincent's wife. She read books, she wore makeup and jewellery even on weekdays. On Sunday afternoons behind locked door, she had me put colouring (Madame Walker's, IMPORTED FROM AMERICA) in her hair. She was a blue foot, a stranger, not a born-ya. She

had crossed water. They did not know precisely where Uncle V had found her. He was the eldest, family head.

A sly dog and purse-string controller, so no one said anything. Aunt Millie smiled often but her mouth was

sewn up. Her reticence offering them few strands, the women of the family enhanced them with embroidery

(washing lightly in vinegar to keep the colours fast). From her straight nose and swarthy skin they plucked skeins

to compose the features of a Jewess, or herring-bone in the outside daughter of a rich merchant or plantation owner.

Her mother was someone mysterious, whipped onto the scene with a slanting backstitch. She once sang opera?

She was said to be of Panamanian or Colombian origin. Something exotic enough — like a French knot — to mistrust

but work in. They reviled Aunt Millie's use of scent. From the few words they extracted they thought they detected

a foreign accent. Sometimes they feathered in 'Haitian', infilled with dark threads to signify the occult powers

of that nation — how else could she have snared such as Uncle V? They thought she kept her distance because

she was all of the above and snobbish. My dears, such airs! She and I were *What a pair!* Myself, orphaned with frayed

edges unravelling into their care. Everyone knowing my pathetic history, I could wind myself up in Aunt Millie's

mysterious air, undulate in the sweet waves (artificially induced) of her hair. She nurtured me on books and reticence. The women of the family fed me cold banana porridge (or so everything then seemed) told me tales of girls who did and men who didn't marry them. Tried to enmesh me in their schemes to undo Aunt Millie's disguise.

In the end they embroidered her an elaborate cover when (I could have said) a plain winding sheet would have suited her.

For to me she gave her story, unadorned. The women of the family willed me their uniform tension. Aunt Millie left me her pearls. I sold them, became a blue foot traveller. Kept no diary. Sewed up my mouth. Shunned embroidery.

(from *over the roofs of the world*, 2005, Insomniac Press, Toronto, pp.78–79)

PAMELA MORDECAI

Writing Home

By now, Grace always know how things going turn out by a feeling in her belly-bottom, and from Pansy start to hang around the Ital Cook-shop that the Rasta fellow, Mortimer, build for himself, Grace know nothing good not going come of it, but what is she to do?

When she venture a comment to Gramps about how Pansy always looking for trouble, though Grace don't reveal how, Gramps shake his head and say, 'That one own-way from she small. Your dead Granny Elsie is partly to blame. Is she mind Pansy when your Ma was still doing live-in housework, before Stewie and Edgar born. Is she spoil Pansy rotten. Never say "No" to that child. It's a sad thing'.

Every afternoon Grace and Pansy walk home from school together from ever since Grace start going to school. Even when Grace is old enough to know the way, it continue like that, which sometimes make her resentful.

'Gracie, is not that I don't think you can walk home by yourself now you are bigger,' Ma explain. 'But I prefer if you and your sister walk together. Pansy can help you if anything happen, if you fall down, or twist your foot, or anything like that. And you can remind her that she not to take her own sweet time — and you know she is a sweet-time miss — for she have things to do when she reach here.'

The trouble start right as Mortimer arrive. The first time they see him, he is cutting lumber with a big saw on a workbench under a *lignum vitae* tree near to the boundary of land that used to belong to Miss-Maud-God-Bless-Her-Soul. Miss Maud die many years previous, but for as long as Grace can remember that is how people speak of Miss Maud, so in Grace's mind that is her name.

Mortimer's shirt is hanging on a bush and he is working with only his trousers on, his bare back looking like somebody spit on it and buff it to a high shine.

Long ago, Gramps explain about spit and polish to Grace. Grace say, 'Naaasty!' when Gramps tell her that is how soldiers shine their boots.

'Ah, Miss Gracie,' Gramps smile and reply, 'like the poor, spit we have always with us.'

There are patches of sweat near the waist and on the rear of Mortimer's trousers and they hold on to his body in those places. The belt he have on is a belt crocheted in Rasta colours, red, green and gold. As he slide the saw back and forth, the muscles in his arms and back remind Grace of a picture of sand dunes in her Geography book. The colour is different but the curves and ripples is the same.

'Peace and love and Jah blessing, sistren,' he say very nice and polite as they walking past.

The structure he is building is down near to the boundary line of the property, with the front of it sitting right on the top of the bank side, so their journey take them straight past his workbench.

‘Afternoon, sir,’ Grace say.

‘You not from round here?’ Pansy slow down, smile her best smile and inquire. Mortimer smile back, shake his head, go back to his work.

‘So what you building?’ Pansy now stop to talk.

‘Come, Pansy,’ Grace say soft-soft, holding onto her hand and dragging her. ‘We not to stop.’

‘Then why you don’t go on?’ Pansy hiss her reply.

‘Just a small shop,’ Mortimer answer, then he solve the problem, for he dip his head respectful-like and turn back to his saw in a way that show he done with talking.

After that day, Grace notice that Pansy start staying late at school one day a week, sometimes two. She tell Ma that she doing extra work so she can maybe pass the grade nine exam and get into the Senior Secondary School in Cross Town. Grace don’t think that is true, but she don’t say nothing, just make sure when school done that she hurry home.

One — rare these days — afternoon when she and Pansy walking together by the cook-shop which is now finished and painted in red, green and gold, with a sign that say ‘Ital Cook-shop,’ Pansy tell Grace to wait a little outside the shop, because she need to tell Mortimer something.

‘What you could have to tell him?’ Grace ask.

‘None of your business,’ Pansy reply.

St Chris roadside shopkeepers only stay in the shop front when things really busy. The rest of the time, they go in the back to tend to their cooking or stocktaking or other business, always keeping an ear out for customers. All a customer need to do is rap on the counter or ring the bell. Pansy now walk into the front of the shop like she accustomed, go down a short corridor and knock on the door that lead into the room behind, where Mortimer is now living.

Grace see Mortimer open the door, smile at Pansy, then look up at Grace as if to give a greeting, but Pansy shove him back inside and shut the door. At the start, Grace can just barely hear the two of them talking, for is a thick door. After a time, she can hear nothing.

Grace stand up, waiting and waiting. She can’t picture what it could be that is taking Pansy so long to tell Mortimer. She have a feeling that something bad is going to happen. Also she feel like Pansy abandon her, for even if the two of them always fuss, she still love her own-way big sister. She is thinking maybe she should take out a book and read, for it don’t make no sense to just stand up doing nothing, and she start to look around for a place to maybe sit down when she hear Pansy shout.

‘Oh Lord! Oh Lord!’ she hear Pansy bawl out. ‘Lord help me. Oh Gaaawd, help!’

Pansy's voice get louder and louder. Grace frighten. She drop her schoolbag, run quick into the shop, and push the door to Mortimer's room with all her might. After a couple tries, it give way, and Grace is looking at one pair of feet with socks, one pair of feet with no socks, four legs with no covering and Mortimer's bare bottom rising and falling with a motion that remind her of when he was using the saw. Grace look, turn right around, march out, pick up her school bag and start walking home.

Pansy is panting hard when she catch up with Grace.

'So... So you going to tell Ma?' She stop. Take plenty breaths. 'You going to tell Ma. Right, Miss Goody-goody?'

Grace turn her head, look Pansy up and down, say nothing, turn and keep going.

'I ask you a question,' Pansy say, rough and gruff, labouring to keep up again.

'Somebody have to tell,' Grace say. 'So better is you.'

'Make you couldn't just wait outside like I tell you?'

'If is that you was going in there to do, why you never just send me home?'

'Is not that I was going in there to do...'

'So what happen? Is force him force you?'

'After nobody can't force me to do what I don't want to do.'

'So you must be force him.'

Pansy make no response to that and Grace think, Puss thief your tongue, for you know I not wrong.

'So you going tell Ma when she come home?' Pansy ask again.

'No need to tell,' Grace say. 'Your clothes mess up, you smell raw and, and you look funny.'

'I look bad for true?' Pansy sounding worried now.

'Couldn't look worse.'

'Well, you go in by the front door and talk to Ma, that is, if she reach home already. Make sure to take up plenty time. Meanwhile I will go in through the back and make haste and change.'

'Pansy, I not helping you hide that business from Ma. You is my big sister but...'

'Sister?' Pansy give out. 'You is most definitely not my sister. After no sister of mine could stay like you. Look how you red and your eye stay funny.'

The rest of the time they walk home in silence, Grace biting her lip and blinking all the way.

* * * * *

Grace win a scholarship in the General Entrance Examination and the whole of Wentley Park Primary school into jubilation. Not that is the first scholarship anybody get from that school, for headmistress is well proud of the results the school get, year after year. But what Grace Carpenter manage to do has not ever been done before, and headmistress, honest as she is, admit she don't expect it to

happen again any time soon. She get the second highest score in the exam in the whole of St Chris, and furthermore she score highest of all the girls that year. It sweet headmistress so till she give the school a holiday.

Ma and Pa are proud too, but they are careful in their praising up of Grace for no one of the children is to feel that they are any less important than the other, and no one of them is to feel that they are loved because they do well at school, for that is not a reason to love a child.

Gramps is another matter, though. Gramps is not Grace mother or father. Gramps may say what he please and praise who he want. And he is in his gungo.

Now it don't usually happen this way, for headmistress normally get the results before the news reach the world as announced in *The Clarion* newspaper. On the day of Grace's triumph, however, the newspaper with the pass list arrive at Mr Wong at the exact same time as the postmistress in Wentley hand the envelope with the results to headmistress. So with one accord the news bruck out in the two places and Gramps is therefore wriggling around on his dancing feet when Grace arrive home early the afternoon.

'Good afternoon, Professor Carpenter,' he greet her. 'May I carry your briefcase, Professor?' he continue, as he twirl his hand in circles before him and then hold it in at his waist, bending forward in a deep bow. Then he stand up straight and press on. 'I hear glad tidings, Professor. I hear that you have secured a post that will take you to the big city and away from this humble village. We shall be sorry to see you go but we are transported at the tidings.'

As she give him her schoolbag, Grace trying to hold in her smile so it is not too big across her face. She know Gramps is trying to cheer her up by talking like that, for over the waiting time, they more than once have a 'Suppose I get a scholarship' conversation. She confess to him that she want to go to secondary school but she don't want to leave Ma and Pa and the boys and Princess and Sam, 'and you too Gramps'. There is no alternative though, for the high schools near to Wentley Park are too far for her to travel to each day, and Ma and Pa can't afford the bus fare anyhow. In Kingstown she can stay with Pa's cousin, Miss Carmen, who have a house close enough to school so she can walk. And besides, if she get through to St Chad's, her first choice school, is a much better school than any of those nearby. So Kingstown it will have to be.

Now that the news is here, she confuse as well as frighten. She not surprise that she pass and win a scholarship, for she never think that the exam was hard. In fact she not even surprise that she win a place at St Chad's. But she wasn't expecting to come so high, and now it happen she don't have a plan in her mind. She don't know how she is to feel about it or what she is to think or say.

So she is scared about a lot of things, starting from how to fix her face when she is getting all the praise, and going along up to how she is going to manage all by herself when she leave Wentley Park and go to a strange city.

She and Gramps walk up the path between the cosmos plants that are yellow, purple and orange and grow thick and full, even in the dry time, for they drink up Ma's soapy washing water and keep coming back year after year.

'The Professor is very pensive,' Gramps say. 'Have you had a difficult day, Prof?'

Grace look up at Gramps and nod, and fat tears run down her face, jump from her chin onto the starched bodice of her uniform, leap off from there to plop on the ground.

'I think you've had too much excitement, Miss Gracie. I made some Seville orange lemonade and there is bully beef and crackers left over from lunch. How would you feel about some vittles to celebrate?'

Gramps say nothing about the tears. He fix up lunch while Grace go inside and take off her uniform, change into her day clothes, and take out her homework books. Then she go and sit at the table where Gramps set out lunch.

'Father we give thee thanks,' Gramps pray, 'for this food, which we ask you to bless unto our bodies and our bodies to your service. We give you thanks especially for this great success that Gracie has had news of today, and ask you to help her to be joyful at this time, and not be afraid, knowing that your grace will be sufficient for her. Amen.'

'Amen.'

'Now eat up, Prof. Ma send to say congratulations. Mrs. Sampson too. Ma say she leaving early.'

'Pa coming early too, Gramps?'

'He will come as soon as he can, Gracie. But you know he is not his own master.'

Gracie wonder why, if slavery so long done.

* * * * *

Never mind that Grace gone off to secondary school in Kingstown, she and her brothers are still thick as thieves. For one thing, she write them faithfully every time she write Ma and Pa and Gramps. Quite apart from school, there is plenty else to write about, for life in Kingstown is as different from life in Wentley as barge is from brown sugar.

For one thing, in Kingstown day and night is the same, at least in that part of the city where Grace is boarding. People forever on the street, cursing, laughing, shouting, dancing to sound system music till morning come, so Gracie have to learn to sleep with a pillow over her head and to go down into a deep dark underground of unrest from which she get up drugged and headache, instead of refreshed from sweet dream-filled slumber, warm and safe against the bodies of her siblings rain or shine, which is what she is accustomed to in Wentley Park.

Grace boarding with Pa's first cousin. Miss Carmen is plenty older than Pa, well past sixty, while Pa is fifty-one on his next birthday. She is the most straight-

and-tall woman Gracie ever see, not stiff, but she walk always with shoulders back and chin up, like she own St Chris. Her thick hair is completely white and mostly she wear it in a long plait coiled on top of her head like a crown.

And she always wearing clothes make out of African cloth, blue and gold, green and red, purple and orange. They old, plenty of them, with the colours wash out, but the patterns are still spectacular. The tops are large and loose fitting with long matching skirts and sometimes trousers.

'Miss Carmen,' Grace make bold to ask after she been staying at 127 Manfield Park Road for a week, 'how come you wear those clothes?'

Miss Carmen raise her eyebrows enquiring and ask, looking down on herself, 'These clothes? Why? You like them, Grace?'

'Yes, ma'am. I never see anything like them before.'

So Miss Carmen tell Grace how she is a long-time member of the United Negro Improvement Association, and how she meet the great Marcus Garvey as a girl, and how she go with her mother to the plays and parades in Jamaica that he organize. Miss Carmen born in St Chris, but she go to Jamaica as a child, and grow up there, and only return to St Chris as a young woman.

Gramps long time tell Grace about the UNIA and Marcus Garvey. But Gramps never meet Mr Garvey, though one time as a young man visiting Jamaica he squeeze into the back of a hall and hear the end of a speech Mr Garvey was giving about the need for the negro race to be proud of itself and proud of its descent from the peoples of Africa and glad of their inheritance of those ancient cultures and civilizations.

'I wear these clothes because I like them,' Miss Carmen say. 'They suit me and make me feel...' She do a slow spin to show off the pattern of splashes and circles, and finish off, 'special!' with a smile. 'But,' she go on, 'I wear them too so people will notice. I want folks here to learn about where our ancestors came from and to understand the great struggles we faced to get where we are now.'

Miss Carmen is always talking about heritage: British heritage, which she say some Christiphonians do have in their blood but all have in their head, since, from they capture it in the seventeenth century, the British running St Chris till Independence which they just get, nine years ago. She also talk about her Indian heritage. Right at the minute she is busy finding out about it for she just discover that her father's father's father was a indentured labourer from Calcutta, come like so many others to work in the sugar cane fields of St Chris.

Grace think a lot about that word, heritage. She wonder if your heritage could get into your genes, into your blood. And Miss Carmen is not even as black as Pa or Gramps or Ma. She is a brown woman, though her hair is curled tight. Maybe one day she can talk to Miss Carmen about heritage, about where the red in her and the puss eyes come from.

Grace walking home from school thinking about this, thinking too that Manfield Avenue is one long stretch of bar and dance hall, though there is really

never room enough. People dance in yards on dry hard-packed earth or on cement that they pour over dirt, so it break up quick and they patch it and patch it again and a lot of the time it so crack up and bumpy she wonder how anybody can walk on it, much less dance. The bumpy floors of poor people ballrooms don't stop nobody, though. People jump and wiggle and wind to the music, night after night, same way.

As for the signs that tell about the dance sessions, Grace find them so funny that she write them down and send them to Stewie and Edgar and Conrad. In one part of the Avenue, the signs always rhyming and making fun.

'Cosmo as Butch Cassidy, Carl as Chaka Zulu and Fenton as John Shaft invites you to celebrate The Year of the Water Rat at Steve's Hideaway, A Nite of Passion in the Latest Fashion. Come even if Your Bones Squeak. We Got the Tonic to Make you Feel Sonic.'

'Lord Nineymoon and Lord Tennysun with Don the Juan and Sancho the Pancho Call One and All to the Original Manfield Dance Hall for a Knight of Stir-it-Up and Dance Till You Drop at Huntley's Honeypot House. Pay the Cover and Be a Lover.'

Stewie's English Language teacher want the class to write poems and send to the St Chris newspapers. The idea of writing a poem is a big joke to Stewart, but he tell Edgar, who been writing songs since ever. So Edgar start to send poems to the paper. He make sure to enclose in his letters a copy of any poem he send to the papers. No poems don't come out in any paper yet, but he keeping on with his efforts.

More than anything Grace is glad for the letters from Edgar, Stewie, Ma and Pa and Gramps. Even Conrad send a short note every now and then, which Grace is happy to get even if it is under orders from Gramps and, as she well know, a way to get him to practice his penmanship and teach him letter writing skills. Ma also send a parcel every so often by someone coming in from Wentley Park on business, banana bread or St Chris spice cake, or Ma's special sweet potato pudding, as well as a bit of pocket money and toiletries that Grace suspect are courtesy of Mr Wong.

Grace know she can go home when Christmas come. Till then she have to live with the noise and confusion of the city and make what she can of her school of first choice, and new-found place of torture, the great St Chad's.

* * * * *

After she board one month with Miss Carmen, Grace start staying late at school every now and then so she can complete the better part of her homework in the library. Nobody with ordinary human powers of concentration is able to focus their mind on serious brainwork in the musical commotion taking place on Miss Carmen's street almost every night, so Grace decide in third form to stay every day and do her homework at school.

The assignments increase each year and now, in fourth form, she is starting the University of Cambridge 'O' Level exam syllabus, and most days it take her over four hours to finish her homework.

Sometimes, late in the year, it is well past dark when she is getting home. As she walk down Manfield, it seem to Grace that the dance party phenomenon is getting more and more widespread. These days, the speaker boxes are set up outside for they will take up too much space in premises that want to jam in the biggest possible number of patrons. The enormous black rectangles are like small residences. If a hurricane blow down your house, you could easy take up shelter inside one of them. Grace wonder who is responsible for making them. She is sure it is a local effort for they look sturdy and stout in a way that says they are home grown machines, make to take hard knocks.

Stewie, Edgar and Conrad still writing her faithfully. *The Clarion* has taken three of Edgar's poems, and he is proud as punch. They even pay him a few dollars for each one. She has the clippings of the published ones that he carefully cut and send to her pasted up on her wall. She don't know if her brothers share her letters to them with Ma, Pa and Gramps. She don't ask. It seem to her that they are getting big now, and have a right to their own business.

And they are looking out for her interests still.

'Mind how you staying on the street till late at night,' Stewie write.

'Careful and don't take no chance in that Kingstown city,' Edgar write.

'Take care of yourself!!!' That advice is from Conrad who is learning about punctuation.

There are four other lodgers who live with Grace and Miss Carmen in the house, for that is how Miss Carmen make her living. Two are sisters, very old ladies with all their family gone abroad. Nobody connected to them left in St. Chris, but they refuse to leave and go to the USA or Canada or England, where they have relatives.

'We can't stand the coldness and furthermore we not able for anybody to treat us like we have no nose on our face.' So say Miss Isoline.

'We live here as people for too long. Better to be poor and somebody, than rich and no better than a mus-mus.' So say Miss Glosmie.

Miss Carmen do everything for Miss Isoline and Miss Glosmie: cook food, wash clothes, clean their room, get medicine, write letters if need be, take them to doctor if need be, take them to church when they feel up to it, see that every day in good weather they take a walk around the small patch of yard in the back. Every month their children send money to take care of them. Miss Carmen manage their bank business too, make sure to pay their tithes at church, put something in their savings accounts, make their contribution to the Burial and Benevolent Societies.

There is space for two other boarders, and in the time Grace been in Kingstown, two young lady students from America come and go. The two boarders who just arrive since September to take their place are connected to Miss Carmen

distantly. Mr Philmore Buxton is Miss Carmen's dead husband's second cousin once removed. (Grace is not sure how that work but she vow to ask Ma or Pa or Gramps.) He look to Grace as if he is maybe forty or so. Mr Buxton's wife, Ermina, looks plenty older than him. She is on leave from her job as a schoolteacher to get her BA degree and she is in her second year at the University. He is supposed to be looking for work. They don't have no children.

Grace help Miss Carmen with the old ladies, doing some ironing of their clothes, fetching things from the grocery and the pharmacy, making them tea and lemonade, walking with them around the yard, reading to them sometimes. Pa and Ma pay a little something for her board, but this assistance is part of the arrangement, and Grace don't mind, for Miss Carmen is a gracious lady. It is always, 'Please' when she appoint a task and 'Thank you' when it is completed.

Grace don't see much of Mrs. Buxton who in addition to her studying give extra lessons to make a bit of money. Mr Buxton is not in the house very much either — Grace presume he is out hunting for a job — except on Sundays when Miss Carmen provide everyone with a dinner fit for a bishop, complete with special beverage and dessert. After Sunday dinner, the Buxtons are accustomed to go to visit Mrs. Buxton's sister that live outside Kingstown in a settlement called Emancipation Heights, almost an hour's bus ride from where they live on Manfield Road.

So one Sunday afternoon when Miss Carmen is taking her once a week sleep after dinner, and the old ladies are taking their regular afternoon sleep, Grace is surprised to hear somebody tap lightly on her door. This is when she get her school things ready: iron her uniform, darn any little tear in her middy blouse or her school tunic or in any of her clothes, clean her shoes, brush her hat, wash and oil her hair, cut and clean her nails. Sometimes, if she manage to finish her homework, she read and maybe take a nap.

When she open the door it is Mrs. Buxton.

'Miss Grace, I am sorry to disturb you.'

'It's okay, Mrs. Buxton. Something wrong?'

'Well, I don't really know. Mr Buxton leave just after dinner, say he was going to the corner to buy cigarettes — you know, from one of those fellows that sell on the road?'

Grace nod.

'I don't see him since, and if we don't get the next bus to go to my sister it will be too late, and we can't not go, for she not well and she count on us...' She pause, like she don't quite know how to put the next thing she have to say. 'She count on us for certain little things.'

Grace nod again, this time to indicate she get what Mrs Buxton is saying delicately. 'Certain little things' could mean they take her money or foodstuffs or toiletries. 'Certain little things' could also mean she is mental, or handicapped in

some other way, and the once-a-week visit is the only time she see caring people. Grace understand the subtle possibilities of these little things.

‘The ladies downstairs are all asleep, so I am asking you to tell Mr Buxton when he come back, for he will come looking for me when he don’t see me at the bus stop, that I have gone and he will see me back here at the usual time.’

‘I’ll be certain to tell him, Mrs. Buxton.’

‘Thank you very much, Miss Grace.’

Gracie listen as Mrs. Buxton hurry soft down the stairs and go out. When she hear the door close, she turn back to her book. She read for a while and her eyes get heavy until they make up their mind and close and she is under the arm of the big dolphin mama fish, so that together they gently bruise the bright water, leaving behind fine veins of froth in a train of disappearing webs. Suddenly the water is turning dark and cold and something wake her, not a noise, more a funny sensation in the air, a feeling of stifling, like the room is different and not in a good way. She half lift her lids to look through the window opposite her narrow iron bed, but there is nothing strange outside. The sun is setting, and the late Sunday afternoon settling on the city make it so the music blasting out of the mega-speakers seem muffled and the noises of people shouting seem not quite so loud.

She rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, swinging her legs on the ground, bending down to take up her shoes, when she look towards the door and see a man at the head of her bed. It flit across her mind, ‘He must be come for the message...’ In the self same minute, she find herself frozen with fright, for who is there but Mr Philmore Buxton, stink of sweat, and stinker of liquor, with his belt loose and his hand on his pants front that is puffed up like a pyramid-shaped balloon.

He is between her and the door and there is no other way out of the room. He is a big man, not tall, but thick and meaty.

Oh Jesus! Try as she try, she cannot move hand, foot, finger or toe! She can’t blink. Her mouth can’t open to scream. Only her eyes are crying, tears following after each other down her face like children in a line at school.

Mr Philmore Buxton get the zip down so his trousers now sliding onto his hips, penis poking through the slit of the pants, stiff and swell up like a ripe cucumber. The falling-down trousers don’t hold him back. He take two steps forward, throw her on the bed, drop himself on top of her. One hand hold tight round her neck, the other one shoving her skirt up round her waist, dragging down her panty. The stiff penis poking her, the force and tribulation of it freezing up her brain. She think her lungs going burst, only take a breath when the thing settle in the V between her legs. The air crank her brain.

And she think of Ma, what Ma tell her and Pansy again and again since they small.

She distracted for a second when she hear her panty rip and feel the elastic sting her, for it is only a flimsy nylon thing. She panicking now, fear in her belly, for if him shove that baseball bat into her parts, she know she will just burst wide

open. But then the stinking penis that pushing into the hair between her legs not getting through the thick tangle, and in that minute Grace remember.

‘Scratch. Pinch. Kick. Jook with knee, finger. Bite anywhere you can bite!’

Grace cannot move knees or elbow or fist, for he is heavy on top of her, pinning her down, but one of his ears is now and then close by her mouth for he is moving up and down, trying to get inside her. When next it come up, she open her mouth and bite the ear, determined that top teeth going meet bottom teeth, like Ma instruct.

She hear a monstrous scream come out of the man’s mouth, and he rail up on the bed and grab onto the side of his head, face squeeze up, mouth twist. She spit out something gristly in her teeth.

‘Take him by surprise and run!’

Warm wetness in her mouth and blood on the side of his face and she don’t stop for nothing more. She heave him off of her, race through the door and down the stairs with the tear-up panty dropping down her legs. She drag it down and step out of it at the door, pull down her skirt, gallop out into the street. Barefoot and bawling, she run and run, up Manfield Avenue, past the Telephone Exchange, past the butcher shop, past the pharmacy, round the corner by Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses, up along Meinster Road past the Anglican Church of St Bride. The cuts and slices on her foot-bottom bite every time she touch ground, but the pain only register in her head.

When she come to herself, she realize she is running for her friend Olive’s place. Olive is boarding too and always telling Grace how she is sorry that she, Olive, is not boarding with family.

ANNE COLLETT

Pink Icing and the Sticky Question of Popular Culture

At a now not so recent conference on Caribbean popular culture,¹ I chose to speak about *Pink Icing*, Pamela Mordecai's first short story collection, because it seemed to me that short story collections in general, but more, this collection of stories in particular, allowed me to consider the complex question of popular culture: what is meant or can be understood by the term.

Although Pamela Mordecai is better known as a poet, children's author, anthologist, scholar and editor of the *Caribbean Journal of Education*, a number of the short stories in *Pink Icing* (published by Insomniac Press, Toronto, in 2006) had been published previously in small magazines (*Prism International & Mangrove*) and anthologies and were recognised for their literary quality. She was runner-up in the Prism International short story contest (1998) and short-listed for the James Tiptree Jr award in 2000. But 'literary' short story collections do not tend to sell well, and would not generally fall into the category of popular culture because they do not appeal to 'the masses'; yet story-telling is perhaps one of the oldest modes of popular culture, and the Caribbean short-story in particular, draws upon that oral, performative heritage. What happens when the oral becomes literary, when voice becomes print? 'What happens' is a question about the impact of the shift from spoken to written word not only on the text itself, but also on its readership which is in turn related not only to a required level of literacy and reading skill/experience, but to the (local and global) publication process.

Using Mordecai's *Pink Icing* as a case study allows me to examine how the local and global are played out in the literary life of the author, in the short stories themselves, and in the editing, marketing and distribution of the book; which leads me in turn to the issue of the location of author, book and reader. Given the impact of globalisation on literary publication, and the degree to which an alliance between the familiar and the popular might shift to an alliance between the exotic and the popular, I am interested, Alice-like, in the degree to which, or in what circumstances, 'Caribbean popular culture' might be understood to be the same as 'the popularity of Caribbean culture'.²

Although Pamela Mordecai has lived in Canada since 1994, most of her short stories are set in the Caribbean, sometimes but not always identifiable as the Jamaica in which she was born and grew up:

In my Granny house, is a real window, a window with glass. It sit sideways and twist to open and you stick a little iron pin in a hole to make it stay. In our house, is just a

space over the door with pieces of wood shaped like the sun — not the whole sun, just half, right at the bottom, with rays sticking out and space between so the air can visit from room to room. ('Chalk it up', *Pink Icing* 15)

This is the nostalgic world of childhood and young adulthood — the formative years that place the individual within the group. These are the years that (unless irredeemably fragmented) create and consolidate a sense of belonging to a human community and a natural environment. The stories of this collection are not necessarily autobiographical but are clearly informed by personal experience: the reader is introduced to the stories and the author with a page of acknowledgements that begin, 'In 1992 my father died and I wrote "Limber Like Me", which is the story that got this book going' (7). But rather than begin with the story of initiation or the story with which the collection and perhaps the pain (and pleasure) of childhood memory begins, I will turn to the story that most closely reverberates with my own memories of childhood, 'Pink Icing', in order to elucidate and interrogate the relationship between a shared 'remembrance of things past'³ and my understanding of popular culture. *Cric-crac! Listen up!*

I take out my penny-happeney, and pass it across to the Chinese lady behind the counter. I take the slice of cake from her with great care, step outside the store, and begin by carefully peeling off the bit of wax paper at the bottom so none of the cake goes with it. Then I nibble quickly through the yellow part. Now in my hand is a bare, naked square of pink icing.

I take the first bite. ('Pink Icing', *Pink Icing* 51)

For me too, 'pink icing' is the stuff of childhood, but for me it is the birthday party cupcake, pink icing covered in hundreds and thousands or little silver cachous; the incredible excitement of birthday party anticipation — the food, the presents accompanied by the anguish of party games and the anxiety about difference and acceptance — the desire to be part of the in group, to be popular. Like Proust's Madeline cakes, pink icing conjures remembrance of things past. The cover of the book itself encourages this reading, featuring a sepia-toned photograph of a young girl (perhaps Pamela herself). Is the stuff of childhood, the work of autobiography and memoir, the stuff of popular culture? I think perhaps it is, if popular is to be read as something held in common — the common or shared experience of childhood (no one's childhood is the same as anyone else's, but growth through experience, though the experiences will vary enormously, is much the same); and of course we also share the tendency to reflect upon childhood in our later years (from the distance of adulthood) — so (the literature of) nostalgia too might be deemed 'popular'. Thus 'popular' might be understood in terms of 'an experience or feeling shared by the majority'. The cake that features in the story 'Pink Icing' is not a party cake and thus has quite different associations for the author/protagonist; but the story nevertheless is curiously close to one I could have written from my own childhood.

The protagonist relates how she and her sister take the bus to school most days, but how, ‘on some afternoons we go home on foot to save the bus fare.’ ‘I say “we”,’ she qualifies:

because it is me and my sister Jennifer who go to Sacred Heart Academy. She is older than me and neat and always presentable, and she has lots of friends. Sometimes we walk home at the same time but it is not together. She walks ahead with her laughing friends and turns back every now and then to shout at me, ‘Why don’t you hurry up?’
(‘Pink Icing’, *Pink Icing* 41)

I am struck by the similarity of our experience (mine and the protagonist/author): I too have a sister named Jennifer, although she was younger than me; and I too took the bus to school with my sister in the mornings — the Church of England Girls Grammar School in Canberra to which I and my sister were ‘privileged’ to go because my mother taught at the school and our tuition was part of what, these days, would be called her salary package. I say ‘privileged’ with some irony because, coming from a much poorer background than the daughters of diplomats, businessmen and upper-level public servants, it was an experience of mixed pain and pleasure — probably more pain than pleasure on reflection. Like the girls in Mordecai’s story I too walked home from school with my sister — ‘at the same time but ... not together’ — to save the bus fare of thruppence. But being older than my sister Jennifer I was the one ‘neat and always presentable’ and I was the one shouting back to my younger sister to hurry up! She, being four years younger with much shorter legs and a bit of a dawdler to boot, found it hard to keep up with my demanding pace; but it was not just meanness on my part that accelerated my walking pace, although that was certainly an aspect of our sibling rivalry — it was also my fear of dogs of which there were many and fierce along our route home.

Although Mordecai’s story follows a route that is particular to (I assume) an area of Kingston Jamaica, and my route home is particular to my childhood in the suburbs of Canberra, that story route/root is uncannily similar in many ways, not least of which is the dénouement upon which both the protagonist and the author are focussed:

After I cross South Camp, I make another break for it, crossing Deanery so as to be on the side with Up Park Camp. (I wonder where is Down Park Camp. If it has ever existed, I have never heard it spoken of.) Again I put my life in peril. It is always waiting for you, but if you face it with firm resolve, you can overcome it. Sometimes I think that I am only eight years old and should not be facing peril, but most times I do not mind because of my prize at the end. (43)

It is at this point in the story (about half way through) that I begin to wonder about the title: where and how will the pink icing feature? For that I too have to wait for the prize at the end:

Now I start to run fast-fast down the sharp incline, for I am anxious to reach. Also, as I run, I get a nice feeling in my tummy. Quickly I round the small circular entryway into Thrifty Store. Then I stop, and compose myself, and step inside.

I am here to get my slice of cake with pink icing. It costs a penny-hapenny — my bus fare. (50)

My bus fare too was well spent at journey's end, not on a cake but an ice-block (or ice-lolly as some would say) — the double kind that you split down the middle (a stick on each side) — orange, raspberry or lime — that ran down your arm in the hot pavement sun.

Although 'Pink Icing' is a story whose belonging is specific to the Caribbean, it is a story that resounds in me, a story with which I am familiar and in whose language I feel at home. This might seem curious, even spurious, given the use of Jamaican Creole, or 'nation language' in Kamau Brathwaite's terminology.⁴ But in this story, and in all the stories of the collection, Mordecai writes in a language that is intended to be accessible to the general reader. It is a language of popular culture in that it speaks not only to the particular experience of the Caribbean, but it is sufficiently 'translated' for broader consumption, such that it also speaks (albeit differently) to those like myself who have no lived experience of the Caribbean. That is to say, it is the language of popular culture in its locality of origin by merit alone of its being vernacular, and it is the language of a 'global' popular culture in that it can be understood in the English-speaking world (Canada for example or Australia).

Interestingly, the language in which Mordecai speaks of herself and her writing, is a language that uses the metaphors of an everywoman's shared experience of domesticity (again not every woman's domestic life is the same in its particulars, but each woman nevertheless shares a commonality of experience that is at the very least biological, but also constituted by a shared history of patriarchy). A piece written for Jamaican writer Geoffrey Philp's 'blog spot' is titled 'The Freedom Recipe'. Here Mordecai relates how no matter what the writing task, 'I've got this image or shape or feeling inside me somewhere, a sort of embroidery pattern, a sort of magic-pencil outline, a sort of distant melody, that knows how what I'm writing should look', and adds that, 'the sound that I hear when I'm writing, is the sound of Jamaica Talk. The rhythms and word play of this language, its verbal sound clash, its shrill or low Anasi *keh-keh* laughing, this is the noise that drives my tap-tap-tapping on the keyboard' (Mordecai, 2006a). Writing is related to cooking, sewing, singing, child's play, and, in the second instance, with an oral folk tradition. The first might be the popular culture of a woman's home life anywhere (although not everywhere) in the world, the second is popular culture specific to the Caribbean; but it is a culture that has resonance well beyond the shores of the Caribbean — in the Africa from which it originated, and in the wider world, transported and transplanted not only by the physical diaspora of peoples, but by the diasporic nature of word culture, and more so than

ever before, by a global communication and marketing network that renders the local, global.

In a keynote address, delivered at Ryerson University (Toronto) in July 2005, Kamau Brathwaite suggested to his audience that we (meaning those of Caribbean descent) were at 'the beginning of a second momentous middle passage' that was 'so much more complex ... with borders not what they used to be', but that now the means of negotiating and crossing those borders was not only music (that those of the African diaspora had always come with) but literacy. He spoke of the migration of the tongue and of his belief in the possibility and the power of 'a music and literature of transformation'. This was no longer he said, employing the words of Wilson Harris, a 'tremendous voyage between two worlds' — that of home of origin and place of exile — but a 'spectrumification' of base — a voyaging between multiple worlds that are one world 'in flow' — what he described as 'a continuing tidalectical experience process from home to home, from home to whom, from origin to continuum, from love my beloveds to love' (Brathwaite, 2005/06).

Yet if such a world (that 'no man is one island and no island belong to one man' [Brathwaite, 2005/06]) is a reality and not the misty-eyed day-dreams of an aging poet, then Pamela's Mordecai's revelation of how *Pink Icing* 'came a cropper with one publisher in the US *because many of the stories were in Jamaican dialect*,' [italics in original] should come as a surprise; but it doesn't (not to me at least). Borders are indeed, 'not what they used to be'. There may be a greater freedom of movement than ever before, but there is also a greater patrol of those borders than ever before. Of this inability or refusal to cross borders or even to enter into negotiation with difference, of this inability to recognise the translatability of englishes and 'other' cultures of the americas, and thus to reject her collection of short stories as unsuitable — indeed, unreadable or incomprehensible, Mordecai remarked:

And that's too bad. Some other reason would have been okay, but not that one. It's too bad in this age of languages crisscrossing each other, flying over borders and boundaries, because people will find ways to talk to one another, yes bredren and sistren, they will. Which is another reason why all writing is the same — because it's all part of a gigantic written-spoken conversation about everything in the world that people everywhere in the world are determined to have. (2006a)

'Now I start to run fast-fast down the sharp incline, for I am anxious to reach.': I love that sentence — it so exactly fits my feeling and experience. For me (perhaps because I am not Caribbean) it is poetic — hitting just the right note of the strange and stimulating with the familiar and true. Having spent so much time 'living' in the Caribbean word/world through my love of Caribbean poetry, it may be that my sense of familiarity in the language, my sense of pleasure in the word, derives from this time; but it may also be that poetry is more of a universal language than decades of denial of the universal in the pursuit of the rights of

difference would have us believe. Mordecai certainly believes in this language. She speaks of 'the freedom recipe' that will be arrived at 'by using and delighting in our heart language that slides easily onto our tongues and that will find a way to communicate with other languages of heart and home' (2006a). Is this then popular culture? — the culture and language of the heart? I fear at this point that my critical faculty is turning to mush and I am threatening to emulate the misty-eyed aging poet for whom 'love' is the answer. 'Love' may well be the answer but it's not easily accomplished — for borders are redrawn and fortified as quickly as they are transgressed. So as to avoid complete dissolution, I would take you back to the problem of the short story with which I began — which is also a problem of marketing, distribution and money — and back to the definition of popular culture that I am in danger of reducing to something approaching nothing.

In his address, Brathwaite explained that 'by culture I mean the texture of life ... the texture and lifestyle of peoples ... culture seen as tidalectics of motion and emotion'. This is culture, but is it popular culture? What makes culture 'popular'? and is this the same question as 'what makes a culture popular'? The content of Mordecai's collection of stories might be said to constitute popular culture in the way I have described (paradoxically, either in the Caribbean because it is vernacular and distinct but common to that culture, or globally, either because the essence of that described experience is held in common, or because the Caribbean itself has become popular — it could be said to constitute a cult of the exotic.) That which is held in common would seem to be the key here. But is the world that Mordecai describes common to all those who grew up in the Caribbean or is it particular to a class of people, or even to a group of people living in Jamaica, or living in Kingston, Jamaica, or living in a particular locality in Kingston, Jamaica. The same question might be asked of those who 'consume' that culture in the global economy — are they a specific group that might be defined by class, age, gender, race, education? Does something have to be valued by the masses for it to constitute popular culture? And related to that question is that which asks if 'culture' as 'product' also has to be accessible to the masses to constitute popular culture? So if Pamela Mordecai's collection of short stories is produced by a small press with a limited print run and accessibility to the work is also thereby severely limited, can it be said to constitute popular culture? I think my answer to that is probably not. But I would like to return to the idea of popular culture as understood not so much in the marketable product (that is, the material object — the book, or the dreadlocks — as recently appropriated by my daughter at the hairdresser's for \$350) but in the shared experience it represents. I would return you to Brathwaite's phrase 'tidalectics of motion and emotion'.

Tidalectics is the principle of tidal flow — a cyclical movement of coming and going in which cultures cannot be discrete or self-contained and neither can they be utterly engulfed to disappear entirely. There is a general mixing of fragments in the tidal wash of the living and the dead; the oceans are discrete

yet joined as one body of water, connecting all peoples and all land and all cultures to each other. Raphael Delleo understands this concept, as enunciated by Brathwaite in the idea of 'tidalectics' and Edouard Glissant in 'errantry', as 'Movement, which keeps the subject-in-process from hardening into a fixed identity' (online, para 14). Perhaps popular culture might be understood as this constant process of cultural translation — a sharing of culture that results not in some kind of monstrous undifferentiated amorphous amalgam, but in a huge diversity of possible combinations and understandings of cultural fragments. 'For [José] Martí as much as Glissant or Brathwaite,' writes Delleo, 'the chaos brought on by economic and cultural exchange (what we might call globalization) simultaneously threatens Caribbean identity and cultural production, while highlighting its possibilities' (online, para 18). When I read 'Pink Icing' I am not only recalled to scenes of my own childhood but hear echoes of the childhood and adolescence of Margaret Atwood and Alice Munroe's fiction, and I wonder to what extent Pamela Mordecai's reconstitution of a Caribbean childhood — in her memory and in her fiction — has been translated and transformed through experience of Canadian culture, and the wider culture of world literature. Is this an example of 'the new literature of the intercultural reconstitution of fragments' of which Eddie Kamau Brathwaite speaks?

NOTES

- ¹ I refer here to the 2007 biennial conference of the Australian Association for Caribbean Studies on 'African Diaspora and Popular Culture' held at Victoria University, Melbourne.
- ² A reference to Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, and Alice's remark at the Mad Hatter's tea party that suggests 'I mean what I say' is the same thing as 'I say what I mean' (67).
- ³ Allusion to the original English translation of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* [Remembrance of Things Past], most recently translated as 'In Search of Lost Time'.
- ⁴ See use of this term in Brathwaite's *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*.

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Olive Senior

LEAVING HOME

one day, strength (from
 where, you don't know) to aim
 for the opening, to say: I am leaving.
 To walk to the edge of your feeling.
 To load up with guilt (not a word
 from the ones at the threshold). Not
 a word! You keep walking. Down
 the dirt track, to the lane, to
 the street, to the highways of
 the world. You alone. Not yet stunned
 by the brightness. Not be hardness
 of stone, of the pavement. No.
 You say: I could get used
 To this lightness.

Till the day
 you're snared by another sensation:
 on a hilltop, at that, you find yourself
 drowning, a movement of ebbing
 and flowing. You recognize early
 (or too late) that you failed to detach
 from that mooring.

Always, cruelty of choice.

Here's the knife.

Yourself:

Executioner

Midwife

(from *over the roofs of the world*, 2005, Insomniac Press, Toronto, p. 60)

EMMANUEL OBIECHINA

Market Literature in Nigeria

BACKGROUND

This discussion is based on three books that I wrote on market literature early in the nineteen-seventies. They are titled: *Literature for the Masses* (Nwamife 1971); *Onitsha Market Literature* (Heinemann 1972); and *An African Popular Literature — A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets* (Cambridge 1973). *Literature for the Masses* and *An African Popular Literature* contain critical commentaries on pamphlet literature, while *Onitsha Market Literature* is an anthology of selections from the writing supported by a long introduction. To gain a fairly comprehensive view of the scope, texture and thematic variety of market literature, one could have recourse to these books and to essays and reviews that are part of the enclosed bibliographic references. The discussion here is a drastically condensed view of a very complex subject matter.

At the end of the Second World War, a spate of popular writing of the type referred to by some people as chapbooks developed in Nigeria, in the commercial town of Onitsha, on the south-eastern bank of the River Niger. It became known as 'market literature' because of the importance of the Onitsha market in the production and distribution of the popular literature. The first three titles were issued by the Tabansi Publishing Company of Onitsha in 1947. They were *When Love Whispers*, a love tale; *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales*, a collection of Igbo folktales, both by Cyprian Ekwensi; and *Tragic Niger Tales*, two short stories dealing with the tragic consequences of marriage by proxy, by Chike Okonyaia, an Onitsha schoolmaster. Cyprian Ekwensi is best known as the first Nigerian realistic novelist and author of more than twenty novels and short stories. What is not often equally well-known is that he made his debut as a writer in the field of market literature. The literature grew rapidly and by the late 1950s, a couple of hundred different titles could be amassed by a collector from the Onitsha market and bookstores adjoining it.

The rise of this popular writing coincided with the tremendous spurt in the growth of literacy in the southern part of Nigeria, the sudden population explosion, the drift of a large number of people from the villages into the cities, the rapid increase in Nigerian-owned and operated printing presses, and the diversion to commercial, industrial and technological development of the energy and money previously devoted to the war.

All of these factors and more were evident in Onitsha and ensured that that city became the seat of market literature. The town is a gateway to the densely populated eastern hinterland and a point of contact between that hinterland and

the rich mid-western and western parts of Nigeria. As the Niger River is navigable to the north and south, Onitsha is well-situated for trade and became an important trading and missionary centre from the mid-nineteenth century. Trade also gave rise to a rapid growth of its population; from a little over ten thousand people in 1921, the population of Onitsha had risen to 96,000 in 1960 and passed the 100,000 mark by the time of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. The increase in population was attended by an increase in educational institutions at the primary and secondary levels and a consequent growth in the number of primary and secondary schools in the east of Nigeria and perhaps in the whole of West Africa, especially since the 1940s when the maximum educational expansion first occurred.

The end of World War II had direct bearing on the rise of the market literature. The return, in large numbers, of demobilised soldiers resulted in an influx of primary school leavers from the adjoining villages to the town of Onitsha. The returned soldiers, armed with their war bonuses, came to set up trade as mechanics, furniture makers, shoe makers, blacksmiths, ironmongers, and so on. Others used their money to establish printing presses or to become traders. They invited their relations from the villages to join them as apprentices and trading assistants and these, in turn, increased the population of secondary and primary graduates continually turned out by the local schools.

The influx in the 1940s of Indian and Victorian drugstore pulp magazine fiction was a factor that affected the format of pamphlet literature. By far the most significant factor that made the rise of the literature in Onitsha inevitable was the concentration of large numbers of locally-owned and operated printing presses in the town. Before 1940, several weekly newspapers had been established in Onitsha, Aba, Calabar, Port Harcourt and other eastern Nigerian towns by the old-guard of Sierra Leonean editor-printers. These could not be well-served in the war years and fell into disuse. Their owners sold them to new proprietors who thenceforth converted them to the less ambitious function of producing stationery, posters, and business and greeting cards. At the end of the war, government and some private newspaper proprietors in southern Nigeria were able to import new printing presses. They used these to replace old worn-out presses which they sold at knock-down prices to the public.

These second-hand printing presses were bought and set up in and around Onitsha Market and were ready to hand for the printing of the pamphlets as soon as writers appeared. In a sense, the availability of the presses and their card-printing activities encouraged would-be writers to exploit the existing facility. The fact that pamphlet writing grew out of the earlier miscellaneous activity is still evident in the large numbers of advertisements inserted by publishers on the back pages of pamphlets, inviting readers to order business-cards, greeting-cards, school-report cards, work-rules, and posters which are also produced by the publishers.

The existence of the Onitsha Main Market itself was crucial to the rise of pamphlet literature. Most of the pamphlets were printed in or around this area

and could be seen, during the heyday of the literature, in their hundreds on racks in one section of the market. Numerous bookstores in the vicinity of the market which sold text books and stationery also stocked the pamphlets. The market also provided the hard-core readership and some of the writers and publishers.

AUTHORSHIP AND READERSHIP

Like most other creative writers in West Africa, the authors of the popular pamphlets were amateurs rather than professionals. They all had full-time occupations from which they earned their living, unless they were students. They were therefore more concerned with seeing themselves in print than making money out of their writing. Authorship was more or less its own reward and was regarded with great respect approximating awe. Publishers took advantage of the authors. A publisher offering '2s 6d to £5 5s for a good tortoise story' would pay an amount nearer the 2s 6d than the £5 5s. The pamphlet authors very often received a fixed amount and then forewent any further financial interest in the work. The idea of paying a royalty to the pamphlet authors was unknown.

A large number of the pamphlet authors were school-teachers, local printing press owners and booksellers. Others were newspaper reporters, railway men, clerks, traders, artisans, farmers and schoolboys. Schoolboys sometimes wrote under pseudonyms in order to hide their identity from their school authorities. The fact is that those who wrote for the pamphlet literature publishers were not university people; at best, they might have had some secondary education but most only had primary education. The educational background of the authors rendered their writing as literature by the people; but the intervention of the publisher was always a palpable reality. At its peak, the pamphlet activity had assumed the form and appearance of a minor industry. The publisher who was also the printer sometimes briefed the author, especially if he was a new writer, with regard to what titles were most likely to catch the readers' eyes and what phrases were bound to attract attention.

Market literature speaks directly to its audience. Its authors escape the recondite styles and technical complexities that distinguish the art of the intellectuals. They are eager to make contact with their audience as easily and painlessly as possible. That is not to say that the popular authors have no concern for art or do not organise their material and present it on discernible creative principles. Rather, what is being emphasised is that their art is often functional and geared to communicating maximally and concretely with the reader without making too great a demand on his/her critical and evaluative judgment. Such creative devices as irony, paradox and bathos that characterize the works of intellectual Nigerian authors and multiply and deepen their meanings and insights are not generally encountered in the popular pamphlets, except when they get there unintentionally. It would, therefore, be a mistake to apply to market literature the critical tools fashioned for the evaluation of literature by intellectual authors. Since explicitness is the trademark of the market literature, the first principle of

its criticism should be to establish at every stage the vital relationship between the author, his audience and the matter of his communication. This relationship is so concrete and discernible that it sets the market literature apart from other forms of writing in Nigeria.

The explicitness of this tripartite relationship is best demonstrated by the brief prefaces which accompany the texts of market literature. The author of a market booklet or his publisher or a sympathetic third party supplies a preface which graphically explains the intention of the work, what the author/publisher expects the audience to gain from reading the text. It is obvious, therefore, that the target audience is always assumed by the author/publisher and produced according to the needs ascribed to it. It is quintessentially literature of the people — literature by Nigerians for Nigerians. Because of the obviousness of the assumed needs of the audience and the intention of an author to supply those needs in a direct means-ends manner, the pamphlet prefaces tend to read like manifestoes. A few examples would illustrate this distinctive convention of the market literature.

Of the welter of intentions behind the creation of the literature, three seem most commonly mentioned by the pamphlet authors. Most authors would insist that their works are meant to instruct their readers, to reform their moral lives and characters and to entertain them. These purposes are stated without any equivocation in the prefaces.

In his work titled *Beauty is a Trouble*, Ralph Obioha declares his intention as follows:

There are three points that stand as key or a guide in the writer's mind: first, to find out whether the story is educative, secondly, to see that it is entertaining and third, to see that it is instructive.¹

John Ngoh, a young grammar-schoolboy author writes in *Florence in the River of Temptation*:

My aim in composing this novel is to expose vice and praise virtue. To this end I hope my readers will find in this novel an unforgettable lesson which will be their guide in times of difficulty.

N.O. Madu writes in *Miss Rosy in the Romance of True Love*:

The case dealt with in this story is a valuable one, and readers will discover for themselves that the married life of today is often a force, a bargain or a vulgarity rather than a great spiritual enterprise.

Tomas Iguh, warning the reader against obsession with love in *The Sorrows of Love* writes:

This novel is designed to serve as a lesson to some of our young boys and girls who feel that there is another heaven in the game of love.

S.E. Eze says simply of his book, *How to Know a Good Friend*, 'It contains important facts and gives good advice to men and women'. G.O. Obiaga, a

pharmacist, writes in the preface to his brother's novelette, *Boys and Girls of Nowadays*:

The story is full of life, and it depicts the life of young men and women of Nigeria today. The moral drawn from it is educative, cautioning and forestalling all in one, and I hope all and sundry will read and enjoy this story and keep a copy of this interesting booklet.

Sometimes the language in which the moral purpose is stated is less soberly prosaic; it can be witty or even titillating as in Speedy Eric's *Mabel the Sweet Honey That Poured Away*, the story of a child-prostitute who lived fast and died young:

Her skin would make your blood flow in the wrong direction. She was so sweet and sexy, knew how to romance. She married at sixteen. But she wanted more fun. Yet it ended at seventeen. And what an end! So thrilling.

The last remark applies to the story, of course, not to Mabel's life which is seriously censured.

Sometimes, in their anxiety to declare their intentions, the prefaces may embody absurd or incongruous statements as in R. Okonkwo's *Never Trust All That Love You*, in which the author is said to be

showing modern Nigerianization ... [and the] ... capacity of educating the illiterates, who through the means of reading the good novels written in good English language learn greatly.

Absurdities abound in the short statement. The assumption that illiterates can read 'the good novels' and that only they need instruction in the use of good English is absurd, but it reveals the eagerness of this pamphlet author to instruct and improve his audience. In the view of the market literature authors, illiteracy is akin to a disease and the inability to communicate effectively is a serious handicap to anyone intending to make good use of contemporary life and its opportunities.

EDUCATION OF THE READER

The qualities of market literature appear in all their explicitness when discussed against the background of the uses defined for the literature in the authors' prefatory statements: namely, that they are used to inform, to reform morals and manners and to provide entertainment.

The educational role of pamphlet literature was regarded very highly by the authors and their audience. On the level at which the pamphlet authors and their readers perceived life, acquisition of knowledge was very important. The thousands of students who attended the primary and secondary schools in a town like Onitsha and the army of young men and women who poured into the night schools at the end of the day's work demanded extra sources of reading matter to supplement the sources available in the school system. Pamphlet authors cashed in on this existing need and flooded the market with revision and examination-

made-easy texts. Indeed, it is estimated that as much as one-third of the market literature texts were devoted to educational purposes.

In addition to the pamphlets that provide ready-made knowledge and reach-me-down answers used for educational purposes, there are other booklets which prepare their readers for more purposeful participation in the emerging industrial culture. Such works inculcate skills that range from the basic maintenance of simple machinery to how to launder clothes. Pamphlets indicating educational interests include *How to Write Good English Composition*, *How to Write Business Letters and Applications*, *How to Succeed in Life*, *How to Know Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and English Languages*, *How to Know Proverbs and Many things*, *How to Make Meetings* and *Pocket Encyclopaedia of Etiquette and Commonsense*. Pamphlets not devoted to educational purposes like those above have tucked away at their end certain types of information meant to increase readers' awareness, under the heading of 'Things Worth Knowing'. At the end of Mazi Raphael Nwankwo's *The Bitterness of Politics and Awolowo's Last Trial*, for example, the following information is inserted: 'The world population was said to have reached 3,180,000,000 in mid-1963. This amounts to a gain of 185 million in only three years. Of this population, the Republic of China occupies almost one quarter'. This is the sort of information a publisher could glean from *Reader's Digest* or United Nations statistical publications.

Critics are not lacking who find the educational aspirations of the pamphlet authors and their publishers less than beneficial to the growth of healthy educational habits. First, they question the pamphlet writers' capacity to play the role of educators when they themselves may be in real need of education. Then, while admitting that the acquisition of new knowledge is desirable, they condemn the tendency to give and receive it unthinkingly and thus promoting the habit of thinking and writing in clichés.

REFORMING THE READER

Next to providing education, the popular authors devoted a great deal of effort to reforming the reader the better to prepare him or her to face the social, economic and emotional problems of contemporary life. The booklet authors reveal their didactic intentions in their dealing with these problems. They are at their most didactic when they use their works to explore economic problems.

The theme of work excites them enormously. In many of the advice books, the necessity of hard work is stressed. It is rooted in the work ethic which it proclaims unequivocally. The writers also extol the virtue of frugality. Many pamphlets advise young men and women on how to conduct themselves in order to make the best of their economic opportunities. If it is remembered that most of the readers of the market literature are young men and women learning to become traders from the more firmly established masters, apprentices learning some trade or craft from master tradesmen and craftsmen, self-employed artisans and tradesmen and, of course, students soon to become immersed in one kind of occupation

or another, then it becomes obvious why the pamphlet authors feel this strong impulse to use the popular medium to advise the inexperienced town-dwellers. If it is also remembered that in the 1940s the drift from the villages to the city was proceeding at a greater pace than ever before, then the need to give guidance to the newcomers to the city becomes overwhelming. The authors use their works to warn against the snares of the city. They warn against sloth and indolence, as well as against extravagance and falling victim to the wiles of swindlers, money-doublers, card-sharps, good-time girls and prostitutes. The destructive effect of alcohol is also demonstrated in the pamphlets.

The authors warn their readers through cautionary tales, examples and anecdotes against the evils by which individuals lose their money in the city. Three causes of economic ruin are often heavily underlined. They are: getting involved with money-grabbing women; addiction to the bottle; and 'highlife' or the tendency to live beyond one's economic means. Thus the pamphlets carry such cautionary titles as *Money Is Hard to Get But Easy to Spend*, *Why Boys Never Trust Money-Monger Girls*, *Drunkards Believe Bar Is Heaven*, *Beware of Harlots and Many Friends*, *Beware of Women*, *Why Harlots Hate Married Men and Love Bachelors*, and *Money Is Hard but Women Don't Know*. If some of these works read like misogynist tracts, it is mainly because the writers reflect popular prejudice in a largely chauvinistic society. Their sentiments are not passed through an intellectual filter and they are not concerned with political correctness.

The authors adopt various devices for conveying their economic lessons. These range from straight-forward tracts on the need for hard work, frugality and avoidance of the numerous situations from which people lose their money, through simple catechisms, to didactic tales and anecdotes. Artistic sketches and cartoons are sometimes brought in to give concreteness to situations. In one of the novelettes, a character is shown chopping wood in the sun. Then he is shown in a drinking orgy, surrounded by bottles of beer (some empties on the floor). Then he is shown sitting on a wooden bench, very depressed, with his head in his hands. The caption says: 'This man is down and out and ruined by drink'.

In Okenwa Olisa's work titled *Money Hard to Get but Easy to Spend*, the positives of a money-making, working life are stressed in the following sermon:

He who seeks for money and wants to have it must not say that the rain is too much, he must work under it. He must not say that the sun is coming, he must work under it. He must sing his favourite song and work. He must not fear work. He must work hard. He must be obedient. He must be humble. He must be punctual to work. He must endure insult, abuse. He must take trouble of many kinds. He must not play with his business. If a tradesman, he must be honest and sincere to his customers. He must improve his handwork in order to attract customers. He must not charge too much. He must not play with his business, otherwise his business plays with him.

This tract is obviously directed at the small man, as a guide to the apprentice, the manual worker, the artisan, the shopkeeper and everyone within the lower income

bracket. This is why there is such emphasis on obedience, humility and honesty, sincerity and improvement of handiwork, in order to attract customers.

Or, take this brief catechism in R. Okonkwo's *Why Boys Never Trust Money-Monger Girls*:

- Question: Why do boys never trust girls of the present time?
Answer: Because they are money-mongers and cannot tell the truth.
Question: Can a money-monger girl love you if you do not spend money for her?
Answer: No.
Question: Why do many girls love some ugly men?
Answer: Because they can get money from them.
Question: Is it good for you to forget your business and think of your girlfriend?
Answer: It is not. No money, no girls.

In fact, the last point in this catechism is typified by the incident described in C.C. Obiaga's *Boys and Girls of Nowadays* in which Jerry, the main character, is a young man with little education. The reader is told that because Jerry was 'a little bit educated but his education was not enough to put him into any office work', he had to settle down to petty trading. At first he works hard and conscientiously and becomes rich. Then success goes to his head and he changes his lifestyle, substituting extravagance for his previously sensible and moderate life. His new style is described disapprovingly:

Very soon, Jerry changed his abode. He who was living in a filthy room now had three rooms in a storied building. His house was so furnished that one would see one's reflection on the floor and (in) the furniture in his sitting room. People used to say that he had the biggest radiogram in town. And it was true, ducky. Jerry sewed many clothes for different occasions. He had upwards of five suits, many trousers, native dresses and all. Whenever one came to his house, music would be booming from the radiogram. He was as happy as could be...

The signs are written large that the change in Jerry's lifestyle does not augur well for his trading business. There is implied criticism in the carefully documented description of his new style of living — a move from a single bedroom accommodation to a three-room flat in a 'storied building,' the quality of his furniture (people could see their reflections on the furniture), the numerous suits of clothes for every occasion and the unceasing booming of music from the mighty radiogram. All this suggests that Jerry has already taken a false step which will bring him failure. He has failed to adhere to the motto of all those struggling for success: 'Business before Pleasure'. He is trying to have his pleasure before he has worked enough for it. He has not even paid back his brother's capital loan.

His fate is sealed when he falls desperately in love with Obiageli, a pretty but heartless schoolteacher who plunges him deeply into debt and then deserts him. Before she walks out on him, she delivers this abusive farewell speech:

You are bankrupt and that is why you are selling your things. It may interest you then to know that I don't love you any longer. I can't afford to marry a poor man. From today,

do not talk to me. Of course, I don't expect to see you in the bars of hotels (where he had lavished much of his money on her) — you are an idiot.

This last shot is probably the writer's opinion too. Only idiots and suckers allow themselves to be beguiled by feckless young women when they have already secured the means by which they could raise their economic status.

Some of the views expressed by the authors are tilted heavily against women, but it should be borne in mind that the popular authors are all men whose views reflect popular prejudices at the time of the appearance of their works. The picture has since changed as more and more women assume positions of economic responsibility within the social structure and women are writing back to redress the balance in their creative works.

THEME OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Side by side with the theme of economic success is the theme of love. The pamphlet authors are fascinated by it and explore it from different angles and perspectives. The following titles represent a fair sample of the varied perspectives from which different authors deal with the theme: *The Voice of Love*, *Public Opinion on Lovers*, *Love in the Real Sense*, *Salutation is Not Love*, *Love is Infallible*, *The Bitterness of Love*, *The Miracle of Love*, *Tragic Love*, *Disaster in the Realm of Love*, *They Died in the Bloom of Love*, *The Price of Love*, *The Disappointed Lover*, *Love With Tears*, *The Game of Love*, *Romance in a Nutshell*, *Love is Immortal*, *Love at First*, *Hate at Last*, *The Sweetness and Kingdom of Love*, and *The Temple of Love*.

The concept of romantic love is new in Nigeria and Africa, new in the sense that it came with European contact, especially with the introduction of European literatures. Any grammar-school boy or girl who has read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*; Jane Austen's novels; Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; and Dickens' *David Copperfield* (these are among the popular set books for English Literature courses in West Africa) would be acquainted with the central position of romantic love in the lives of English people, especially in their marriage tradition. Other sources include the Victorian romance fiction of popular authors like Bertha Clay and Marie Corelli which entered the Nigerian market in the 1940s and 1950s and left quite an impression on the student population of those heady days. The cinema and certain romantic magazines, such as *Woman's Own* and *True Romances* kept the concept of romantic love alive among young people of school-going age. Through these sources, romantic notions of love and marriage make a strong entry into the Nigerian scene and set up parallel values to the old 'traditional' code of sexual behaviour.

Because romantic love and its rituals are new in West Africa, the pamphlet authors take it upon themselves to teach these rituals through their booklets. There are numerous booklets purporting to instruct the reader on the mystique of love and love relationships. There are such titles as *How to Speak to Girls*

and *Win Their Love*, *How to Speak and Write to Girls for Friendship*, *The Way to Make Friends With Girls*, *How to Get a Lady in Love and Romance With Her*, *The Art of Love In the Real Sense*. One of the most prolific producers of advices on love, Felix N. Stephens, has written, among other works, *The School of Love and How to Attend It*, *A Journey Into Love*, *How to Play Love*, and *How to Get a Lady in Love*.

As part of the convention of love relationships, love letters play a prominent part. The young lovers are often too shy to approach the objects of their interest face-to-face; they prefer to contact them through letter writing. Pamphlet authors attempt to satisfy this need by composing stereotyped love letters to meet all occasions and conditions of love relationships, or by teaching the reader to compose such letters. There are numerous booklets with such titles as *How to Write Love Letters*, *95 Love Letters and How to Compose Them*, *Our Modern Love Letters*, *How to Write and Reply to Letters for Marriage, Engagement Letters, Love Letters, etc.* The use of prepared love letters robs the relationships based on them of seriousness and spontaneity. To the pamphlet authors and their audience the theme of love sustained by love letters is handled at the most superficial level, more as a game than anything else. Occasionally, the matter is handled seriously and reveals deep insights into one of the most problematic areas of the relationships between young people of the opposite sexes. But, by and large, the love pamphlets reveal that the pamphlet authors seldom handle the theme with authenticity. They are often in love with the idea of being in love and the efforts to explore love experiences fall flat and become melodramatic.

Next to the failure of the pamphlet authors to explore love with credibility must be mentioned their subdued treatment of physical sex. The pamphlet writers are outstandingly reticent on matters of physical sex. They impose a severe censorship on themselves and out-Victorian the Victorians in their refusal to deal with such matters openly. Most of their potentially seductive scenes fizzle out because of the lack of will to follow things to their logical conclusions. In one or two cases in which physical sex is explored with openness, as in *Mabel, the Sweet Honey that Poured Away*, the intention is to reveal a fearful lesson arising from the breach of this most deadly taboo of pamphlet literature. The severe, puritanical determinism of pamphlet literature decrees that the penalty for sexual indulgence is affliction with a horrible disease, as is the case of Caroline in Ogali A. Ogali's *Caroline, the One Guinea Girl*, or death, as with Mabel in Speedy Eric's *Mabel, the Sweet Honey that Poured Away*.

The market literature authors devote a great deal of attention to marriage. It is a theme of considerable interest to the authors because, as young people, the problems of marriage apply to them as much as to their audience. The critical issue here is whether parents, according to traditional practice and custom, should continue to exercise their rights to determine their daughters' husbands or,

in accordance with modern, Western-oriented practice, the daughters should be allowed to determine whom they wish to marry.

The theme provides one of the stereotypical plots of the popular pamphlets. Usually, there is the father, the villain of the piece, who is portrayed as an old-fashioned and capricious autocrat with some private, often ignoble, motive for wishing to marry his daughter to a particular suitor whom his daughter has very good reason to abhor. The old man may show decided partiality towards this suitor because he is an old friend of the family (as in Cletus Nwosu's *Miss Cordelia in the Romance of Destiny*), because he is rich and will pay a high bride-price (as in Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*, Highbred Maxwell's *Back to Happiness*, and R. Okonkwo's *The Game of Love*), because he is both rich and an old friend (as in Okenwa Olisa's *Elizabeth My Lover*), or because he is a prominent politician whose glory would be expected to reflect on his wife's family (as in Olisa's *About Husband and Wife Who Hate Themselves*).

In confrontation with the father and his rejected candidate are the lovers, the daughter and her chosen suitor. Between these adversaries stands the mother of the family, torn between her loyalty to her husband and her maternal duty to her distressed daughter. In the end, her gentle persuasion and appeal to the parental compassion of her husband, sometimes helped by the opinion of some members of the extended family and the neighbours prevail on the father to yield to the views of the young people.

The authors' sympathy very often lies with the girls, whose attitudes are regarded as 'progressive' because they stand for the concept of marriage as an affair between two young people 'in love' and not with the fathers who, by insisting on their customary right to select their daughters' future husbands, are regarded as 'reactionary', old-fashioned and a nuisance.

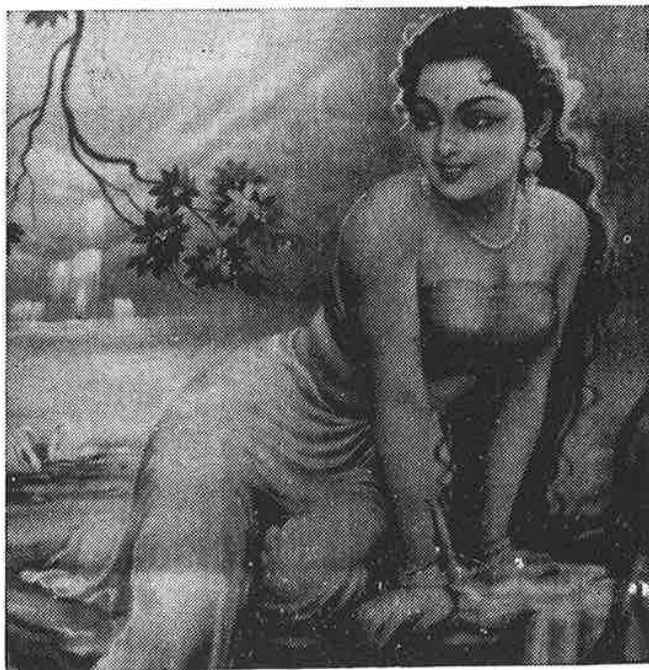
The authors show their support for the daughters and their collaborating mothers by giving them the virtue of good education and by making them speak impeccable Queen's English. The fathers are made as unattractive as possible. They are not only depicted as arbitrary, autocratic and small-minded, but they are further damned by being shown as illiterate and saddled with the most atrocious 'pidgin'.

The best known of these pamphlets that deal with the crisis of marriage is Ogali A. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*. It was first published in 1961 but has been reissued very many times before and after the Nigerian Civil War. It is so popular that it may have sold more than one million copies. It sold 60,000 copies soon after its appearance.

In this Onitsha market evergreen, Veronica, a secondary school student, is in love with Michael, a young civil servant who is also improving himself by studying at home for higher qualification. Veronica's father, Chief Jombo, wants her to marry Chief Bassey who is wealthy and a friend to Chief Jombo. But Chief Bassey has all the negative qualities. He is forty-nine years of age while Veronica

ELIZABETH MY LOVER

A Drama



"LOVE WORKS WONDERS"

Printed by All Star Printers, 62 Iwaka Road, Onitsha.

is only eighteen years. Chief Bassey is also an illiterate, which discredits him in the eyes of Veronica and her mother, Paulina. Michael, on the other hand, is twenty-four years old, physically attractive, well-behaved and working hard in his spare time to improve his education and status. The situation is explosive but is finally defused when Chief Jombo agrees to an arbitration involving some of his relations, the Principal of Veronica's school and some of the neighbours. As might be expected, Chief Jombo is persuaded to yield to his daughter's wish, and the crisis is resolved. *Veronica My Daughter* is also good theatre. It has been performed before school audiences and on public occasions. There is a lot of humour in the dialogue, in spite of the serious undercurrents. If there is one play many Nigerians know and love, it is Ogali's *Veronica, My Daughter*.

POLITICS AND POLITICAL PERSONALITIES

One area in which market literature authors have made a strong showing is in the large number of pamphlets dealing with political personalities in Africa and occasionally outside Africa. The most popular subjects are African nationalists, but illustrious and 'topical' non-Africans are also sometimes the protagonists. The titles include *Dr. Zik in the Battle for Freedom* (T.O. Iguh); *Zik of Africa, His Political Struggles for Freedom of the Black Race* (Chike Mbadugha); *Boy's Life of Zik, the President of Nigerian Republic* (M. Okenwa); *Heroes of New Africa: Zik, Genius of Today* (Okwu Izuogo); *Dr. Nkrumah in the Struggle for Freedom* (T.O. Iguh); *Dr. Julius Nyerere: A Tribute* (T.I. Nduka), *The Struggles and Trials of Jomo Kenyatta* (T.O. Iguh), *Sylvanus Olympio* (R.I.M. Obioha); *The Life of Alhaji Adegoke Adelabu* (O.A. Ogali).

The leader most mythicised and most written about is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) a frontline nationalist of the independence struggle and the first President of Nigeria. As Bernth Lindfors pointed out in *Heroes and Hero-Worship in Nigerian Chapbooks*, this had to do with his being a local boy who made good, a successful Igbo from Onitsha, the home of pamphlet literature. But it was more than that. He was also on the national level, the first nationalist to mobilise the evolving modern class of urban clerks, teachers and artisans into a mass political movement and to infuse them with a spirit of nationalism. His innovative journalism created his reputation in the eyes of the people, and his spell-binding rhetorical style helped to fire the popular imagination. He was vested with powers, some of which were plainly magical and apocryphal. Okenwa Olisa's pamphlet, *Many Things You Must Know about Ogbuefi Azikiwe and Republic of Nigeria* contains most of the popular beliefs about Azikiwe. His education and scholastic successes are seen through the eyes of hero worship. He is portrayed as the enfant terrible to the colonial administration.

The Nigerian and Congo crises of the 1960s were well-covered in pamphlet literature. Patrice Lumumba, the late premier of Congo-Leopoldville (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) became for the pamphlet authors a centralising inspiration. He is characterised as a Christ-like figure, a nationalist

and patriot done to death by a combination of brutal and corrupt adversaries. Tsombe, Lumumba's chief antagonist is painted as a demon, Dag Hammarskjöld, the U.N. Secretary General as 'one of the main brains behind Lumumba's death'. The Congo Crisis yielded these pamphlet titles among others: *The Last Days of Lumumba* (T.O. Iguh); *Patrice Lumumba* (O.A. Ogali); *How Lumumba Suffered in Life and Died in Katanga* (Okenwa Olisa); *The Life Story and Death of Mr. Lumumba* (O. Olisa); *The Trials and Death of Lumumba* (F.N. Stephen); *How Tshombe and Mobutu Regretted After the Death of Mr. Lumumba* (F.N. Stephen); *Tshombe of Katanga* (T.O. Iguh); *The Ghost of Patrice Lumumba* (Ogali A. Ogali). Apart from Dr. Azikiwe, no other African nationalist is written about as many times and as committedly as Lumumba.

The Nigerian political crises are well-covered in pamphlet literature as attested by such titles as *N.C.N.C and N.P.C. in Political War Over 1963 Census Figures* (O. Olisa); *The Iniquity and Trial of Awolowo* (G.H.A. Nwala); *The Famous Treason Trial of Awolowo, Enahoro, and 23 Others* (W. Onwuka); *The Bitterness of Politics and Awolowo's Last Appeal* (Mazi Raphael Nwankwo); *The Complete Story and Works of Military Government and Nigerian Current Affairs, Past and Present, The Record of Northern / Western Crisis in Nigeria Since Army Takeover* (C.O. Uwadiogwu); *The Western Nigerian Crisis and the Army Takeover* (1966 Anon.).

Of the non-African personalities, the most written about are President Kennedy of the United States and the German dictator, Adolf Hitler, the first written about positively and the latter from a negative perspective. In *The Life Story and Death of John Kennedy* and *The History and Last Journey of President John Kennedy* both by W. Onwuka, Kennedy is portrayed as a noble soul who is out to bring succour to the blacks of the United States. He is given speeches that reflect the nobility of his spirit, speeches which are a mixture of his own recorded speeches and those of Abraham Lincoln. The *Trial of Hitler* by S.P. Olayede reports a fictitious trial of the German dictator which owes much to the newspaper and radio reports of the Nuremberg trials and that of Eichmann. Onitsha writers see nothing wrong with telescoping different events of historical significance or creating hagiographical accounts of admired public figures in Africa and outside of Africa, and obversely, demonizing historically discredited personages. They readily reflect the myth-making imagination of the population in general and of popular artists in particular.

MARKET LITERATURE AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

Onitsha was disturbed early in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) and its magnificent market, the home of market literature, was gutted. At the end of the war, a few political booklets appeared, containing the major speeches of the former Biafran head of state, ex-General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu and the ex-Nigerian head of state, ex-General Yakubu Gowon and texts of the Aburi Accord.

A few creative booklets have appeared, in addition to the reprints of the early pamphlet evergreens. Three at least of the new pamphlets deal with the civil war or its aftermath. Ogali A. Ogali's *No Heaven for the Priest* articulates, with a measure of anger previously absent in Ogali's works, the criticisms levelled at the 'relief' clergy who distributed food and medicine (relief materials) from the church aid groups. The end of the war also produced for the first time in Nigerian writing a figure well-known in Greek, Roman, and Italian theatres in the character of the braggart soldier or *miles gloriosus*, except that in the Nigerian case, the braggart soldier is not a comic figure but a sinister creature who was nowhere near the battle-fronts during the civil war but emerged at the end with a stolen rifle with which he terrorises innocent villagers. In *The Tragedy of Civilian Major*, (Nwachukwu) this roving criminal who awards himself a fictitious rank of major creates so much mayhem and disruption that the law-enforcement authority sets up a special task force to apprehend him. Nemesis catches up with him, and he is caught, tried, and executed.

Another pamphlet titled *Mamma-Uwa* (Universal Mother) explores the exploits of a married woman who abandons the respectable roles of mother and wife to become a prostitute and an all-purposes mistress. Her luck runs out, and she comes to an ignoble end.

It is quite obvious that the post-civil war pamphlets present a grimmer picture of life than those produced before the civil war. In the former, the mood has generally been towards the rehabilitation of errant characters. In the post-civil war booklets, no such indulgence is allowed. The feelings of the authors have hardened towards their characters. A very thin line, if at all, separates the evil-doer from his or her death. In the large mass of booklets produced before the civil war, only Mabel, the child prostitute, in *Mabel the Sweet Honey That Poured Away*, is not forgiven or allowed to redeem herself.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it is fair to say that the market literature based in Onitsha and its market effectively petered out with the Nigerian civil war but, as stated earlier, it survived residually after the war, when a few new titles appeared and some popular earlier ones were reissued by surviving presses. It is also equally true to say that the literature has survived as a permanent phenomenon of the Nigerian literary history, because it lives in the works of numerous scholars and commentators, including Ulli Beier, Bernth Lindfors, Donatus Nwoga, Ken Post, and Nancy Schmidt, who have explored it in monographs and essays as a major repository of popular tastes and values of the emergent urban masses in Nigeria.

Market literature has also survived in many university and public library collections in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Germany. Major collections are highlighted in the book by Hogg and Sternberg titled *Market Literature from Nigeria: A Checklist*. Numerous private collections exist in individual libraries belonging to academicians, diplomats and even casual

visitors who were in Nigeria in the heyday of market literature. For example, the former Master of Clare College, Cambridge, Lord Ashby, had an impressive Onitsha collection amassed while heading the Ashby Commission on Higher Education in Nigeria. More recently, the literature has found a major promoter in Kurt Thometz, a New York private librarian and collector of rare books. He has a large private collection of Onitsha market booklets. More importantly, he has selected and anthologised the literature in a book titled *'Life Turns Man Up and Down': High Life, Useful Advice and Mad English* (2001). It is a fascinating book.

Finally, the burgeoning video culture of Nigeria which emerged in the 1970s was substantially based in Onitsha Market, as well as in Lagos and some other urban centres of Nigeria. It is regarded by some analysts as a true successor of market literature, but whether the supplanting of the literature by the popular market video is a cultural gain or loss remains an open question.

NOTES

- ¹ Because of the irregularity in the different versions of a published text and the vagaries of text production, it is often unhelpful to cite specific pages; it causes confusion rather than clarity.

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Olive Senior

PLANTS

Plants are deceptive. You see them there
looking as if once rooted they know
their places; not like animals, like us
always running around, leaving traces.

Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!)
and twine, from their exhibitionist
and rather prolific nature, we must infer
a sinister not to say imperialistic

grand design. Perhaps you've regarded,
as beneath your notice, armies of mangrove
on the march, roots in the air, clinging
tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere?

The world is full of shoots bent on conquest,
invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces,
matériel gathered for explosive dispersal
in capsules and seed cases.

Maybe you haven't quite taken in the
colonizing ambitions of hitchhiking
burs on your sweater, surf-riding nuts
bobbing on ocean, parachuting seeds and other

airborne traffic dropping in. And what
about those special agents called flowers?
Dressed, perfumed, and made-up for romancing
insects, bats, birds, bees, even you —

— don't deny it, my dear, I've seen you
sniff and exclaim. Believe me, Innocent,
that sweet fruit, that berry, is nothing
more than ovary, the instrument to seduce

you into scattering plant progeny. Part of
a vast cosmic program that once set
in motion cannot be undone though we
become plant food and earth wind down.

They'll outlast us, they were always there
one step ahead of us: plants gone to seed,
generating the original profligate,
extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed.

(from *Gardening in the Tropics*, 1994, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, pp. 61–62)

STEPHEN DERWENT PARTINGTON

Underneath the Umbrella of Hope: Syncretism as Solution in the Dialogic Poetry of Mukoma wa Ngugi

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung
(Grace Nichols, 'Epilogue')

To say I am against American terrorism or state
terror is not to say that I am with the suicide
bombers — it simply means I am opposed to all
forms of terrorism. And it is this space, a space to
be sane, to voice and organize against all forms of
oppression, that we have to fight for
(Mukoma wa Ngugi, 'Africa and the War on Terror')

Kenya's post-election violence of early 2008 led the world to take an interest in the signs of failure that this crisis revealed in what had previously, and naively, been thought to be a stable African State. This essay does not directly address the prolonged conflict that I and other Kenyans lived through in 2008, but it does perform a close reading of a 2006 poem on conflict by the US-based Kenyan writer, Mukoma wa Ngugi, the son of Kenya's leading novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Mukoma is a respected young Pan-Africanist, a co-editor of the widely-read and influential online publication, *Pambazuka News*, a political columnist, and author of literary and political titles dealing with Pan-African and cosmopolitan issues. The cosmopolitan poem under study here, 'Underneath the Umbrella of War', reflects upon conflict, specifically the Iraq war and the Kenyan Mau Mau struggle, and, as I will demonstrate, offers the hope of an Africa and a wider world that can justly resolve its conflicts. The poem can be read as anticipating Kenya's post-election violence of 2008.

The cynical critic's default interpretation when presented with the writing of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's son would be to rely entirely upon the mass of secondary literature available on the Father, the precursor poet, ultimately 'discovering' in this literary dynasty a neatly literal version of Harold Bloom's idiosyncratic view of literary history, his famous Anxiety of Influence (Bloom). Yet, firstly, it would be politically offensive and oppressive to read the Ngugi of *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* according to a reactionary theory that views literary history as a unilinear progression of purely Euro-American texts that

together constitute the great Western Canon; the only writing that Bloom, it often seems, considers it worth our while reading. Secondly, such *Vorurteil* (used in Hans-Georg Gadamer's sense as 'prejudiced interpretation' 68) would relegate to the status of mere epigone a talented young Kenyan poet whose debut collection, *Hurling Words at Consciousness* (2006), presents the reader with poems that generally stand on their own feet, albeit, I hope to demonstrate, feet in more than one culture, and in more than one country.

Rather than suggest that Mukoma wa Ngugi is the unproblematic scion of a perhaps chauvinistic novelist whose identification, to many commentators, has always seemed to exclusively adhere, uncompromisingly, to a particular Kenyan ethnic group, the Gikuyu (whom Ngugi refers to as a 'nation' [1987 175], a term that will become important later in this essay), I will propose that Mukoma is a cosmopolitan, postcolonial example of what I call the socialistically democratic Janus Poet, who undermines all such chauvinisms. My essay approaches this representative of the New Generation of Kenyan-related writers — who loosely coalesce as a *cénacle* around the talented editor and fiction writer, Binyavanga Wainaina, and the creative journal, *Kwani?* — through analysis of just one poem from his collection, 'Underneath the Umbrella of War', which is reprinted after this essay. A study of this forty-line verse reveals the following characteristics of the postcolonial Janus Poem: the syncretising of ostensibly disparate cultures, perhaps much as the Roman god Janus was formed from the fusion of Eastern and Western deities; the simultaneous gaze toward the historical past and the dream of the productive future; the concern with (neo)colonial, imperialist violence and the possibility of genuine peace. A 'war-and-more' poem, then, that hybridises the temporal and the spatial, allowing for the hope of culturo-political understanding and reconciliation based upon a generally cross-border socialist appreciation of the causes of that old African chestnut, conflict. All this is enabled by the poet's exotopic gaze.

Mukoma's diasporic position is one that has become familiar to students of postcolonial studies: that of the migrant, Salman Rushdie's 'translated man', who bestrides the world of ostensibly disparate cultures like a privileged Colossus, hybridising effortlessly as he traverses the globe (30). Although in this essay I hope to utilise aspects of those theories that view such an exile-and-émigré poet as being in a position that is liberating and that can in turn liberate, it should be remembered that many of those Kenyan and Pan-African subjects-in-place for whom Mukoma in part writes are of course less fortunate. However, Mukoma cannot be condemned as a treacherous Gramscian traditional intellectual, ignorant of his roots, but rather should be viewed as a poet who offers the reader the possibility of escaping her/his condition of restrictive locality, following in the realm of discourse where he treads physically, at home with his movement.

The Janus Poet — in this case, 'Mukoma' — is a subject-site, a site that throughout this poem demonstrates how it has been subjected by the discourses

of American nationhood and Kenyan history, for example, but which at the same time subjects, or writes, the poem. Avoiding the liberal humanist view of the author as creative genius, the individual who, according to Barthes, pens the monologic “message” of the Author-God’ (Barthes 144), this postcolonial text cannot be totally separated from the pen-name; rather, the subject-poet’s subjectivity permeates ‘Underneath the Umbrella of War’ with Mukoma offering his plural self as the ‘I’ of this at times confessional poem. What is evident in this poem, then, is a constructed poststructuralist self, but one that manages to reconstitute itself in a ‘coherently and subjectively centred way as agent’, something that Rosalind O’Hanlon believes the critic must enable the postcolonial subject to do, if such subjects are to be allowed to occupy positions other than victims of pernicious interpellating discourses such as nationalism, racism, (neo)colonialism in general (qtd in Loomba 242).

‘Underneath the Umbrella of War’ begins with the poet-persona, who may be read as the subject, ‘Mukoma wa Ngugi’, driving across sections of the United States, ‘from small town/ to obscure town’. This obscurity, or state of being unknown, is a psychological displacement, a projection of the anonymity of the poet who, travelling alone as a Kenyan through the blank rural spaces of a foreign land, experiences how the immigrant can, in Julia Kristeva’s formulation, be ‘ignored’ in her/his country of adoption, even when that adoption may have been lifelong (189). This obscurity of place and self seems at this point to chime with that sense of painful psychic dislocation, even schizophrenia, that Fanonian postcolonial theorists often suggest is the defining characteristic of ([neo]colonial) cultural confrontations — Fanon’s ‘Manichaeism delirium’ (Fanon 112). This initial impression of an African lost in the American heartland of modern day capitalistic imperialism permeates the first one and a half stanzas, with the subject-site blindly and alone searching for interpretative clues as to what the ‘population counts pasted on signs’ might really mean during this time of threatening (Iraq) war in a threatening landscape. Ultimately, his uncertainty leads him to clutch at alternative similes, a figure that is always more tentative than the assertive metaphor, and that here suggests a scrambling for interpretation, for identity-and-location-through-comparison.

Certainly, the ‘signs’ on the roadside have revealed themselves through language as what they are: signifiers that float and here confuse, referring to nothing but the next linguistic phenomenon that the poet, in his disorientation, can associate them with. This offering of multiple readings of the road signs draws clear attention to the slipperiness of language and the multi-accentual character of poetry itself. This pair of comparisons to ‘numbers of lives lost in a plague’ or ‘casualties of just living’ seems to be offered as an introduction to the theme of conflict and death, but as just two of an infinite possibility of references that the poet might have discovered; there is a silent punctuation, the three dots of ellipsis, after the word ‘living’ in line four. The reader is reminded that the repository of

imagery is as infinite as sentences in a language. This is not just Empsonian and New Critical poetic ambiguity, where the reader focuses on the words on the page, but a figurative instant during which the reader may be as interested in what is not written as what is written: at other times (perhaps of peace) and to other people, what alternative associations might these road sign statistics have had? However, there is no chance for pretty similes at this time, for the extra-textual context forbids it, subjecting the poet to the necessity of grave images. This is a time of impending and actual wars, notably the Iraq War, and the media was full of them at the time 'Underneath the Umbrella of War' was written.

Yet, this postcolonial poet is not entirely subjected, passively, by the pernicious discourse of war. That is, the discourse of war is not all-encompassing, but reveals its ambivalence and rupture in the poet's recognition of what the road signs are conventionally supposed to represent: 'population counts' — and 'population' as a signifier proliferates with associations of birth and life, much as the 'smallness' of these anonymous rural settlements implies peace. The discourse of war and its correlatives of aggression and death cannot, even at this early stage in the poem, have total sway in the Manichean fashion of Abdul JanMohammed's colonial discourse, but rather the discourse contains the seed of its others, peace and life, and therefore perhaps also the seeds of dissidence (JanMohammed 75). As this poem processes, the poet can be observed chipping away more confidently at the vileness of new imperialist aggression, but even here in this first stanza some assuredness in the poet's formulation of the simile can be read, opting as he does not for the common 'as...as' or 'like', but rather for 'as if', which may be read forcefully, with all the scornfulness of an American slang repudiation: 'As if!' The subject poet has caught a glimpse, which we as readers may share, of war discourse's Achilles' Heel, counter-identifying with that which he is 'underneath', that which would subject him from above; for a moment here, the poet seems to peep outside discourse. This first-stanza counter-identification (or straightforward rejection) is a precursor to the more productively resistant 'third modality' of the theorist Michel Pecheux, which the poet slips into later in the poem, when he dis-identifies with the putative inevitability of war that he is offered by his environment (Pecheux 98). At this later stage, the reader might observe a subject being born into some agency.

Stanza two introduces the reader to the ubiquitous postcolonial issue of nationalism: 'For every town,/ there are flags of salutation'. The pluri-signation of 'salutation' is telling, again hinting at the unstable ambivalence of the powerful discourse that hangs over the poem, for a salutation may of course be a friendly and peaceful greeting and/or a military salute, pointing to war. These flags are of 'God, Race and Country', three traditionally powerful aspects of identity, and are undoubtedly, predominantly, the American flag, which, as the postcolonial critic Robert Young laments,

flies everywhere across the country, planted in every conceivable, possible, and even impossible place: front lawns, car windows, the sides of buildings, corporate websites. Its ideology is materialised through the common lifestyle that keeps the US coherent as a nation, the proliferation of monopoly capitalism that makes most American cities very similar to all others... You always know where you are when you are on the road in the US. (61)

Certainly, the small and anonymous settlements that the poet meets 'on the road' in 'Underneath the Umbrella of War' seem 'very similar to all others', despite the fact that they are not necessarily neighbours on the map of North America, a similarity that is in great part achieved by the omnipresence of the national flag. The poem next refers to the Star-spangled Banner as an 'emblem', the simplest of visual images, which, as Francis Bacon wrote in 1605, 'reduceth conceits intellectual to images sensible'. The defining characteristic of the emblem as a basic symbol since the European Early Modern period, is its crass simplification of complex and weighty concepts, as can be seen here: the poet is aware, although presumably the flag-waving patriots of America are not, that the emblematic flag of the United States in the modern world conflates in its three bold colours some tremendously contentious histories, of American religion, of American racism, and of belligerent nationalism. As Ruth Hsu, amongst others, reminds us, flag-waving 'nation[alism] ... has legitimised and sanctified the destruction and subjugation of peoples and cultures around the world' (154), and it might be said that today it is predominantly the hand of US nationalism that has the power and the inclination to reach, grasp and shake imperiously over the entire globe. Imperialism is nationalism that does not know when to stay in its play pen.

The poet wonders, still in this second stanza only tentatively, questioningly,

What shape
does the winter's cold wind fluttering across
these emblems take? Is it the same wind
that whispers through funeral shrouds?

These lines are cautious, inquisitive, yet powerfully challenging. The two questions here may seem simply rhetorical, but in fact they are the first clear instance in the poem of a forthright democratic act, that of explicitly involving the reader in the active creation of meaning by inviting an imaginative response, by inviting the reader to create her or his own associations. It is here that the poem reveals itself as a fully scriptible text, open and centrifugal, contrary to the charges often levelled at poetry by Bakhtinians, of closure, of centripetality. If the poet provided a sample pair of similes in the first stanza, he is now acting as the psychologist who holds up the ink blots, in effect asking us, 'What can you see in this flag? Can you see this, or maybe this, or...?', so abdicating his function as an Author-God and instead birthing the reader, enabling her/him to reflect, actively, avoiding the passivity that the simple emblem of the flag might seduce readers into, perhaps an acceptance of war as inevitable or, as the George W. Bush administration might insist, noble and just. What shape does the wind

take? That of a 'cold' corpse under a funeral shroud? An American flag draped over a soldier's coffin as it is warehoused — beyond the media's glare — ready for a glorious, rifle-saluted funeral? Or perhaps — an image that this reader finds inescapable — those flags of other nations or denied-nations, draped over biers in Palestine, in Iraq, in Somalia, in the Lebanon, the victims of conflicts that at times reek of American imperialism? In the landscape of the poem, the US flag becomes an emblem symbolising many deaths, symbolising Death, and the reader is invited to consider: which deaths can you, reader, see in this flag, emanating from this nationalism, stemming from this country where not only the administration is implicated, but also to some extent the unreflective flag-wavers of rural America, the 'patriots', the fundamentalist Christians, the anti-Arab racists, the Islamophobes, the voters who ridiculously cry 'Obama Osama'...? Again, the poet employs a silent ellipsis: he waits for the reader to imaginatively re-complicate the simplified emblem of the flag of the most powerful nation on Earth, and in so doing contemplate the many ideological causes and the many victims of that international wrong, imperialistic warfare.

As the poet accompanies us as readers in these complex interpretations of the causes and victims of war — a set of interpretations that can have no single final arbiter, but rather a network of readers who may variously contemplate the plethora of causes and victims that nevertheless network under the umbrella of contemporary imperialism — he experiences 'a fear I cannot name', a fear so intense that it is, to reduce Mukoma to cliché, beyond words. Once more, then, the reader must imaginatively create that fear, and as the poet is now imaginatively transported to different conflict zones, different places, different times, so too must we accompany him and perhaps even take ourselves to other conflicts that might be more familiar, perhaps Palestine, perhaps Yugoslavia, perhaps the Democratic Republic of Congo, perhaps... The reader is encouraged to accompany the poet on a journey beyond sympathy, beyond superficial empathy, and into experience: the distressing experience of the Tutsi, borne down upon by the poem's 'Hutu' and his 'machete'; the fear of the 'Baghdad' resident, pulverised by 'American bombs'. Prompted into this positionality, this identification with various victims of global war, the reader is forced to do more than simply objectify the victim as the other, viewing suffering as someone else's problem, but rather is perversely privileged to share the experiences of the ultimate underprivileged, the postcolonial victims of war. After the outsider's analysis of war and its causes and consequences that the reader was prompted into in stanza two, that same reader is now jolted into constructing, as best he or she can, an insider's view — and, as Terry Eagleton has written, 'Only those who know how calamitous things actually are can be sufficiently free of illusion or vested interests to change them' (136). We are as readers, through our own imaginative agency, shown the path to a productive solidarity with the oppressed, with the subaltern, and inspired through disgust and shared 'fear' to perhaps seek that Marxian 'change' mentioned by Eagleton. The

poem, then, places the reader in two perspective-positions, that of the insider and the outsider, in this way giving us the insider privilege required by Eagleton while at the same time avoiding the isolationism that many cultural theorists such as Peter McLaren argue is the result of believing that only insiders can understand, and may study, insiders:

Either a person's physical proximity to the oppressed or their own location as an oppressed person is supposed to offer a special authority from which to speak... Here the political is often reduced only to the personal where theory is dismissed in favour of one's own personal and cultural identity — abstracted from the ideological and discursive complexity of their formation. (McClaren 125)

Mukoma forces us in stanza three to personalise victims only after in stanza two having obliged us to consider the 'discursive complexity' of war. The human emotion and experience of this section of the poem are contextualised by reference to the nationalist ideology, mentioned earlier, that can extrapolate into war. There is a powerful responsibility here.

The poem enables our imaginative transport by means of the breakdown of the standard punctuation that has preceded this third stanza. The syntax becomes disordered through the segmentation effected by the employment of the dash. As the linguist Roger Fowler writes, echoing Winifred Nowotny, 'syntax exercises a continuous and inexorable control over our apprehension of literary meaning and structure' (242), ordering space-time for the reader according to a set of conventions. In stanza three, however, space-time is disrupted by the many dashes, and syntax and sense consequently fragment and float as concrete images — 'Hutus' and 'machetes', for example — stare out as isolated lexemes. At this point in the text, the reader is disorientated by the poem's structure, or the constructed lack of it, into a sort of nightmarish dream-sequence, a quick-fire of action that vulgarly flashes out across time and space from the Rwandan genocide of 1994 to present-day Iraq with the glint of a blade or the notorious 'Fourth of July' firework analogy used by American journalists when describing early bombing raids over Baghdad. When reading 'Underneath the Umbrella of War', the poet offers an alternative positionality, that of the foreigner: we are all Rwandans, we are all Iraqis, we are all the Gazan or other who suffers in whatever war we care to imagine in stanza three; we all become those (postcolonial — I am writing from my home in Kenya) poststructuralist reading subjects who, as Catherine Belsey reminds us, may 'differ...even from ourselves' (52).

The poet, also, clearly differs from himself here. Earlier in this essay, I referred to Mukoma as an example of the 'translated man', and then proceeded to suggest that in stanza one this 'man' seems disorientated by his current locale, America. If earlier on in this poem, the reader was able to read the poet-persona as a little boy lost in an overwhelmingly different USA, it is here in stanza three that such a reading will be corrected and revealed to be overly dependent upon the idea that colonial-period subjects always experience Fanonian angst. Instead, the reader

can now see Mukoma as the cosmopolitan postcolonial poet, the confident 'I', asserting himself, an assertiveness enabled by his fluent knowledge of the US, gained after long periods spent living and studying there. He is a prime example of the diasporic writer who, as Stuart Hall hopefully insists, 'provides the prospect of a fluidity of identity, a constantly changing subject position, both geographically and ontologically' (qtd in Ashcroft *et al.* 218). This poet ranges effortlessly over the globe, over time, over alternative interpretations — of road signs, of flags, for example — and the uncertain 'I' of earlier stanzas now becomes self-assured, becomes an individual with some agency, some ability to change the world in Eagletonian fashion, rather than just a passive subject. So, when he becomes a victim 'without/ a face' in stanza three, he is no longer back in the position of the anonymous Kenyan immigrant who I said was possibly ignored in stanza one, but is instead imagining himself as one of the faceless others in Rwanda and Baghdad, an imagination made all the more believable and genuinely empathetic because he, Mukoma, has himself earlier experienced this facelessness. Partially rooted in America, Mukoma's learning and experience nevertheless knows few borders; his mention here of facelessness even transports the poem and the reader to his Kenya, intertextually referring as it does to one of Mukoma's journalistic articles from the South African youth culture journal, *Chimurenga*. Again, this polemical article visits the topics of violence (terroristic and imperialistic), US insensitivity toward foreigners, and victimhood:

On August 7th, 1998, truck bombs exploded simultaneously in Nairobi and Daresalaam. 10 Tanzanians were killed and 75 injured, but Kenya bore the brunt of the attacks with 245 Kenyans and 12 Americans killed. Or, as the American press would have it, 12 named Americans with faces and 245 unnamed faceless Kenyans were killed.

(Mukoma, *Chimurenga* online)

Mukoma's poem adds features — his own and ours — to the hitherto 'faceless' foreign victims of violence. How are these victims referred to in the poem? As 'strange fruit', an allusion, particularly charged for the African and the American reader, to the Blues song about lynched African Americans hanging from trees during the period of legalised Segregation in the southern states of the US. Not only does the implication seem to be that suffering and death is suffering and death wherever it may be, but also, in alluding to victims of racism within America in this way, the poet seems to suggest that the US still does abroad what it used to do at home, exporting racist violence across the globe. This is not a pretty allusion, nor a light accusation — there is an angry disgust in this metaphor of 'strange fruit'. No longer do we have the tentativeness of simile, but now the assertiveness — echoing Mukoma's own increased assertiveness — of the more certain figure, metaphor: the modern victims of imperialist war really are the same as the victims of far-right racist lynch mobs! If this imagery of exported violence might seem like the merely fictional rantings of a disgruntled left-winger, Mukoma backs the figurativeness up with a literal export: 'American

bombs'. Europe's neo-colonial endeavours do not go unchallenged either: it was 'French and Belgian guns' that in part armed the fury of the Rwandan genocide and that, like US military equipment, training and interference continues to threaten peace and people in 'independent' Africa and the wider world via such military organisations as AFRICOM (United States Africa Command), which became operational in 2008. Indeed, this reference to one of the most lucrative of European and US exports cannot help but suggest the depravity of modern global capitalist economics, something that too many postcolonial writers and critics, to my mind, forget in their obsession with vulgar culturalism — the modern-day intellectual's inversion of vulgar Marxism. Here, in stanza three, the poet enables us to see that neo-colonial violence does not stem from discourse alone, from culture alone, from signifying practices and other textual instances of postmodern *jouissance* and *ludism* (how can we apply such terms to conflict?), but equally from economics, which today sees nuclear technology proliferated to India and tanks allegedly smuggled to Southern Sudan, and which can still assert itself as foundational even in these days of theoretical equivocation.

Following his nightmarish dream-sequence, the poet-persona then refocuses on his journey through an American winter's night. Statements such as 'Night-time is here' display a sense of foreboding, the threat of another US-led conflict, the coming full war in Iraq that, up to now, remains violent, and that has since proven to be far more complex an undertaking than the initial flag-waving hubris of the Bush administration suggested would be the case. Not only is there a symbolic night, but 'The sun has turned/ his back' on the world. Readers from the so-called Western tradition might catch an allusion in the poet's prosopopoeic reference to the sun, a personification that has always been biblical, denoting the Son, Jesus. The 'sun', with all its religious and biological associations of life and Life and love and peace has seemingly abandoned the world, leaving it in the grip of the new, overarching and umbrella discourse, War, which now stands threateningly, apocalyptically, at all four corners of the Earth. The recurrent imagery of snow and the 'bare' landscape, again in the Western tradition symbolising death, reinforces a certain morbidity here, and almost brings with it a fleeting sense of helplessness after previously assertive stanzas.

Yet, even here there is hope for the reader, for despite the continually violent imagery of his seemingly 'dismembered' head here in stanza five, the poet can see, 'Peering/ through my car window, my face...half inside/ and half outside'. He is back to his present self, deictically located as me, here in the car, and in the now of the poem. What he sees at this moment, through the mirror imagery of the reflective window at night, is his own face(s) — no longer that of once faceless victims — positioned both as insider and outsider. Now explicitly drawing attention to his privileged, transculturally plural subjectivity as — amongst other things — a Kenyan in the US, the poet through his act of self-awareness can be read as a self-sacrifice, offering himself as a microcosmic example of 'cross-

culturality', which, as Ashcroft *et al* state, is 'the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group "purity". [It is] the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilised' (35). Glimpsing and then articulating to the reader his own internationalism and his own interculturalism — that is, his status as 'translated man', the Janus Poet — Mukoma not only counter-identifies with the nationalisms explored earlier in the poem, railing at the US, but begins to offer that 'third modality' hinted at above, a dis-identification or an alternative subject position. Neither just the US lackey — a member of Anthony Kwame Appiah's 'comprador intelligentsia' (346) — nor the simplistic, knee-jerk foreign loather of the US, Mukoma-as-*Janus-Poet* offers a third, syncretic position.

I would suggest that this corresponds to Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space of enunciation', the zone where different cultures (here, the US and the Kenyan, among others) meet and at points hybridise as our poet effects a series of linkages and fusions between the times and places of these different cultures (Bhabha 8). Our Janus Poem, then, is what I will call a Third Space Artefact, a textual site where cultures intersect, a site that reveals to the reader how cultures can change and optimistically hybridise, leading us to embrace and correct the wrongs of the 'inter-national culture' that the poet presents us with (Bhabha 8). It becomes 'third', rather than on the one hand the sort of conservative (say, 'Colonial') text that allows for no alternative to the *status quo* of oppression or, on the other hand, the impossible purity and authenticity-promoting poem that still frequently comes from East Africa, typified by the nativist 1970s *Songs* of Uganda's late Okot p'Bitek. At the very least, 'Underneath the Umbrella of War' offers the reader the hope of socialist change while at the same time practically countering, by virtue of its own hybridity as Janus Poem, the vain reaction of yearning for a mythical, exclusively pre-colonial Eden — the Janus Poet is no nativist. In passing, Bhabha has referred to the Third Space as 'alien territory', and from East Africa it really is: spatially, temporally, culturally, politically, aesthetically. Mukoma's poem is part of a new and youthful phenomenon in the region.

This Third Space of postcolonial, diasporic syncretism can be further reflected upon if the reader considers the 'dialogic' characteristics of 'Underneath the Umbrella of War'. Earlier, I noted in passing how Mikhail Bakhtin, perhaps for reasons rooted in the dogmatism of the Stalinist regime he worked under and the lyric poetry he had to hand, dismissed poetry as centripetal, as always moving toward closure, forcing readers into a sort of conformity dictated by the author. I have already indicated how the reader of this poem might, on the contrary, be liberated and activated, but I would go somewhat further and suggest that the poem has characteristics of dialogism, something that Bakhtin believed could only be fully realised in literature in the novel. Here is the Bakhtinian concept of the dialogic as articulated and reinterpreted through the prism of Jan Mukarovsky by the Kenyan critic, Kimani Njogu, who is as concerned as I am in his 2004

study, *Reading Poetry as Dialogue*, to counter the second-class status that poetry as a genre has been relegated to in literary studies in general since the demise of New Criticism, and in East Africa in particular:

the speaker can be both a subject and object of discourse in so far as he or she is capable of distancing the inner-self from the outer-self. The inner-self in that case becomes another. What we witness in such situations is an objectification of the self in order to establish a dialogic relation with the self. This tendency would explain why the soliloquy may be dialogic although on the surface it gives the impression of being monologic. (10)

In short, the self can talk to itself, a revelation that gains even more currency when the poststructuralist claim by Belsey is recalled, that ‘Subjects can differ — even from themselves’. Our Janus Poet’s fluid and composite subjectivity allows that face inside the window to converse with the face outside. There is a relationship of Self and Other throughout much of this poem, where the Self and the Other are selfsame, both being components of the subject-site poet; a non-absolute alterity in which the Other is comprehensible on its and the Self’s own terms. This is Bakhtin’s ‘exotopy’, but not in the conventional novelistic sense of conjunction-disjunction between author and character, but rather a distancing-and-identification between ‘selves’ within the same subject-site, leading to a dialoguing balance of objectivism and subjective experience that has been seen to be a key to cross-cultural understanding. No fixed, authentic or chauvinistically ‘pure’ identity is necessarily found in this poem, for as Derrida suggests, ‘An identity is never...attained, only the...process of identification endures’ (qtd in Harrison 132); and yet this pursuit, this ability by the Janus Poet to quest, and for her/him to similarly engage us in that quest, enables the readers to go beyond themselves seeking connections and solidarities in an otherwise atomised world. There is great hope in this poem, even in these fourth and fifth stanzas where the imagery of despair threatens total disillusion. Where the despair in what have become called the early *disillusionment novels* of Ngugi wa Thiong’o — for example, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977) — and his first generation colleagues in Kenyan literature seems to be straightforward and monologically unrelenting, depressing the reader as it depresses the writer, Mukoma’s New Generation poetry offers hope and a window onto agency.

That syncretism, that sense of this postcolonial poet’s easy confidence in various situations, continues now throughout the poem, and we learn that ‘In.../Ohio, I could be home’. These lines are left deliberately ambiguous: either he is home in Ohio, or Ohio reminds him of ‘home’, perhaps Kenya. Either way, there is a comfort in place, a sense of recognition rather than dislocation — America is no longer ineluctably alien and other. Inviting the reader to do otherwise, as the poem itself does, I will read this line to mean: ‘Ohio is homely enough to remind me of my Kenyan home’. Partly this reading is prompted by the fact that, immediately after his survey of Ohio, the poem shifts to Kenya. My interpretation forces me to

continue reading to discover what it is about Ohio that causes it to resonate with the poet's Kenya. In stanza seven, it would seem to be the following that conjure these associations: 'scarred hands', 'black lungs', 'soil' and 'black diamonds'. Skirting over the obvious and perhaps Négritudist imagery of blackness, it might be noted that many of these items, and indeed much of stanza seven, evoke labour, the working person, the proletariat, the American equivalent of the earth-working peasants from Kenya. This sense of suffering labour is highlighted in the alliteration, with the harsh, bilabial 'b' sound spreading throughout the stanza, conceivably echoing the pick-blows of mining or the coughs of the workers. Here, the poem presents the equality of suffering between workers across borders, and it becomes a sort of literary *Comintern*. If belligerent, simplistic, flag-waving US nationalism intimidated and alienated the poet earlier, leading the reader to condemn the hubris of a martial Republican administration, the material suffering of American workers seems to position them, instead, as victims of the capitalism previously criticised, not just economically, but also mortally — there is certainly a slow death in their 'black lungs'. The US is not indiscriminately condemned in this poem, then, for the suffering of the impoverished workers exonerates them from war-blame. The Janus Poet's multidirectional gaze enables him/her to connect the dots between cultures, sensitively tracing networks of blame and suffering across the dimensions of space and time. Far from luxuriating in his own privileged position, relaxing into an irresponsible postcolonialism that Arif Dirlik infamously characterises as 'the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism' (524), the poet retains a profoundly responsible socialism. He is not here writing from a tenured chair in a US university, but instead this poem comes to us from the cold winter soils of backwater America, where calloused hands work the earth.

The poem says 'home', and the poet then invites us to his ancestral home, Kenya. But home is not just place, it is kin, and it is history. Mukoma invokes his grandmother, a powerful woman of a generation that supported the independence struggle of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. This was a revolutionary movement composed predominantly — but not exclusively — of members of the Gikuyu, Meru and Embu ethnic groups; a movement that has come to be known internationally by its British colonial name, *Mau Mau*. Although to suggest as Ngugi wa Thiong'o often seems to, and as many Western-located, hagiographical Ngugian critics too easily accept, that *Mau Mau* was the only force for independence in colonial period Kenya — an approach that condemns, as the historian Bethwell Ogot reminds us, all other Kenyan revolutionaries to 'a second death' — would be somewhat revisionist, there seems little point denying that *Mau Mau* as a name symbolises independence revolution in Kenya, even though the movement was not Kenyan-nationalist in any countrywide sense (9). There is, similarly, no reason to suggest that it was, in the main, and especially at the outset and in its motivations, anything other than a peasants' revolt, to use

the term applied by the socialist independence leader, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, even if those peasants did not necessarily spring equally from a variety of Kenya's many ethnic groups (Odinga qtd in Atieno Odhiambo 42). The Janus Poet's vision of American 'peasants' conjures, then, an imaginative solidarity with Kenyan peasants as he continues writing from Bhabha's Third Space, finding 'those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others', linking the disenfranchised of distant continents (Bhabha 8).

But what of the grandmother's struggle? She 'died/ broken by struggles without fruit'. The word 'fruit' is of course an anaphoric reference to the 'strange fruit' of the syntactically broken stanza three, and so a reminder of the links of victimisation that exist between the Kenyan peasant and the African American of the Segregation era, but the word as used in the phrase quoted here has an additional poignancy to the Kenyan reader, and the wider African reader. *Matunda ya Uhuru* ('fruits of independence') is a Kiswahili phrase that was used frequently in the years following 1963's nominal independence, and it was roughly a synonym for another well-known phrase, 'the national cake'. Indeed, the phrase forms the main title of one of the most impressive Kenyan essays on the symbolic meanings of *Mau Mau*, the historian E.S. Atieno Odhiambo's 'Matundu ya Uhuru (Fruits of Independence): Seven Theses on Nationalism in Kenya'. As might be expected, the freedom fighters, amongst other subaltern groups, hoped that their sacrifices might result in 'fruits', in material and social benefits. The immediate post-independence history of Kenya echoes that of many new African nations — in short, and as Frantz Fanon points out, a neo-colonial elite took the reins of power and with it reaped the rewards of what was often others' struggles. This process has been well argued and lamented by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and countless others, and can be summed up in this uncharacteristically blunt statement by Mukoma: 'African governments, with few exceptions, are useless' (Mukoma, *Chimurenga Online*). If that word 'fruit' acts as an allusion for the Kenyan reader, so too does the use of the word 'flag' in the same stanza, for Kenya has the politically-charged and still radical phrase, *Uhuru wa Bandera*, or 'flag freedom', referring to the commonly-held belief among socialists especially that in 1963 colonialism merely became its cousin, neo-colonialism, with few benefits to the mass of the population. From a superficially different American cultural context there is the Broadway allusion to Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, about an African American family's struggle to make sense of their lives under circumstances of profound inequality. Informed readers will also notice that Mukoma's rhetorical question, 'What of her raisins in the sun?', is an allusion further back to Langston Hughes' 1951 jazz poem, 'Harlem' (sometimes known as 'Dream Deferred'), in which activists' postponed or failed dreams of social justice wither. Again, this is Mukoma making an effortless cross-cultural reference from American segregation back to his own Kenyan grandmother, whose struggle was similar to that of those African Americans who have through

the ages struggled for justice. This stanza details how the grandmother's cause, although just, was fruitless, and she died knowing only a flag freedom.

The proliferation of Kenyan independence-era allusions in these historically dense couple of lines makes us aware of the Janus Poet's acknowledgement of the importance of history. Achille Mbembe is perhaps correct when he states that 'the younger generation of Africans have no direct or immediate experience [of colonisation]', a claim for this continent that Eagleton agrees with in another context when he writes that there is a whole young generation in the Western world that can remember little or nothing 'of world-shaking importance' (Mbembe qtd in Dirlik 510). However, it is the poet's conception of an imagined rootedness in the history of Kenyan struggle that enables him to envisage a way forward into a future that differs from the present; this is a positive, messianic vision that has been lacking in much Afro-pessimist East African literature for decades.

Following his detour into history and cultural roots, the poet returns to the present, as suggested by the reintroduction of the snow imagery. He has reached his physical destination, the home of his lover, but his statement that 'Every life/ has a destination' of course takes us beyond this literal interpretation. It is as if his 'destination' — his destiny — mentioned as it is immediately after his musings on his grandmother's sacrifice, is to fulfil the aspirations of his revolutionary history, seeking to put an end to modern-day imperial warfare in the same way that his grandmother in years past struggled to end the violent oppression of an illegitimate British colonialism; but where, again, is the hope, if his grandmother's legacy is one of ostensible failure? Might his own endeavours not be doomed to the repetitive cycle of history?

Hope springs from his literal destination in the poem, which refracts again into symbolism. He is in bed with his — for want of a better term — other-colour lover, 'Sukena'. The pair 'delight in contrasts.../skin against skin'. This image of contrast, of cultural, racial, sexual and perhaps national difference united in 'delight' — the first use in the poem of an unambiguously positive word — is the hope of unity and solidarity hinted at throughout the poem, and is the text's messianic moment, of bodily-material pleasure and love thriving beneath the umbrella of war. This epiphany is the culmination, the climax toward which the poet and reader have been journeying. '[O]utside the flags keep fluttering' as that extrapolated nationalism, imperialism, persists in the present, but the lovers' passion for unity cannot be dampened.

Finally, the reader encounters that powerful image, of the lovers' embrace being 'the tight clutch of history'. Throughout this poem, the poet has urged his reader to be alert to myriad histories of struggle and suffering, but what of this final line? Again, the poem resists closure, this time by offering, at its very end, a most difficult line. Compression of this enigmatic type creates an inevitable complexity and ambiguity in poetry, or a certain indeterminacy. I would suggest that there is hope here, with the lovers occupying a position

that potentially subverts the discourse of war, their productive love and unity revealing the ambivalence of the discourse of nationalistic war and the racist and other hatreds outlined earlier in the poem; an ambivalence that has existed in this poem from those early, ambiguous road signs to this, the ambiguous final line. Through their love, the couple have revealed martial imperialism's fault line, its insuppressible concomitants, Peace, Unity and Liberty — a hopeful slogan from Kenya's independence era. If there is a 'clutch' in the final line of this poem, it is a potentially successful grasp at hope for the future, a future in which cross-cultural syncretism, effected after great reflection and action on the part of working class and other readers, replaces nationalist conflict; that 'clutch' represents the end of a pernicious and protracted phase of world history. To quote Ashcroft *et al* again, the goal is that 'termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group "purity"'. [It is] the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilised', a goal of ultimate reconciliation that the avowed Pan-Africanist, Mukoma, proclaims in an article on the linked issues of Somalia, Ethiopia, the Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Nazi Germany, Liberia, Nigeria, Israel and Palestine. In this article, he states his concluding hope that 'people from vehemently opposed sides can someday talk to live with each other' (*BBC Focus* 9).

But is this poem, this audacious hope, just that, just 'talk'? Certainly Mukoma has been accused before of being a polemicist whose 'argument is stronger on passion than pragmatism' (*New Internationalist*, online). The answer to my question is unclear, and this is the poem's final indeterminacy, its worldly aporia. It is not a textual indeterminacy, but a social one that can be expressed in the form of this further question to readers: are you willing, following your reflective reading, to act?

'Underneath the Umbrella of War', Mukoma wa Ngugi
(reprinted with permission of Africa World Press and the author)

Tunneling through I-51, I advance from small town
to obscure town, population counts pasted on signs
as if numbers of lives lost in a plague or casualties
of just living. Winona, 27,609, Stockton, 632,
Utica, 250 and at Drover Post, 439. For every town,

there are flags in salutation, more flags than I have
ever seen of God, Race and Country. What shape
does the winter's cold wind fluttering across
these emblems take? Is it the same wind
that whispers through funeral shrouds? And then

a fear I cannot name — here or there I am without
a face — Hutus — machetes — French and Belgian
guns — American bombs that rainbow the skyline over
Baghdad — How many strange fruits shall we bury
underneath these emblems? And I think how starvation

is hunger turned inward, when the body craves its own
flesh until it reveals white bones carelessly covered
by old skin. Night-time is here. The sun has turned
its back on this empty landscape of bare farm after farm
tied together by last night's snowfall. Peering

through my car window, my face, half lit, half inside
and half outside keeps getting dismembered by oncoming
car headlights. There are rows and rows of snow
covered earth turned inward, dull-lit houses that beckon
like a pirate's lighthouse. So I recall an Appalachian

School outpost where under the moonshine confessions
came easy: 'I no longer dream. I can no longer dream
their dreams or mine', the teacher says. 'My nights
are like death. I sleep like I am dying'. In Appalachia
Ohio, I could be home. In this land of scarred hands

of black lungs, of soil turned to the earth's bone for black
diamonds — I could be home. My grandmother died
broken by struggles without fruit. Bones like hers — flag
poles. What of her raisins in the sun? Every life
has a destination, and lying in bed covered only

by a moonlight magnified twice by felled snow,
me and Sukena delight in contrasts, scars against scars,
skin against skin — but outside the flags keep fluttering —
and as I burrow deeper into her skin, this can no longer
be a lover's embrace but the tight clutch of history

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SAMIR R. MTAMBA

A POINTLESS JOURNEY

He arrived in a country
To which he was not destined
Only to discover that it was his own home
Where everyone from yesterday's frenzied farewell party
Made a fuss about his brief absence
And what they called triumphal re-entry.
Although they could remember him very well
They did not address him by name
Which they said he had lost on his way out
And now all the names were for sale.
Then he discovered to his dismay
That he had not a penny to his person!

The future rejected him
By refusing to happen according to his plans
And when he fell down in the fatigue of the present
They quickly buried him in the past
Where although he was not very well known nor welcome
They allowed him
To mingle quietly
With the less significant others of his generation.

THIS COUNTRY IS A FEVER
(POEM FOR J.D. GILES IN THE CALIFORNIA SUN)

This country is a contagious fever
And though you only travelled its veins
Insulated by a thick alien skin
You caught its germ in your blood
And so quiver with the discordant discourse of all who are ravished by it.

I too was a mere passerby
Following the footprints of my fathers
Chasing illusions of sequins in the sand
Only to lose the clarity of vision
Bequeathed by the waters of my ancestral rivers and lakes
Forever through my sweat drops
Feeding the thirsty hot sands of exile and betrayal.

My own shadow is now a sphinx
Whose cryptic questions I cannot answer
To win passage into the horizon, retreat and reprieve
To where the spirits dance
The totemic dance of destiny
Hand in hand with immortality.

Though our congenital trespasses and *karmas* are different
We are, by complicity, united
Victims of wander mania
The crime of presence, having been here or there once or many times.
Thus even though I melt in this fever here
You cannot escape the rhythm of my death throes over there
For this country is a terrible fever
That afflicts all adventurous birds of passage
To all corners of the world.

(19/10/07)

ERIC DOUMERC

Moqapi Selassie: Dub Poetry in Birmingham

There is a tradition of underground performance poetry in England which thrives and survives well apart from the big publishing houses and which relies mainly on performance for its survival. Indeed poets like Levi Tafari in Liverpool perform regularly, but do not publish much. This may be due to a certain reluctance on the part of publishers to publish their work, because black performance poetry is by its very nature a poetry of the moment, destined to be heard at a certain occasion, a celebratory event or a social gathering.

Black performance poetry today in Britain has its roots in dub poetry. The words 'dub poetry' refer to a type of oral poetry which developed in Jamaica and in England in the 1970s thanks to the work of poets like Mutabaruka (Alan Hope), Orlando Wong (Okuonuora) and Linton Kwesi Johnson. In an interview granted to the critic Mervyn Morris in 1979 Okuonuora defined a dub poem as 'a poem that has a built-in reggae rhythm — hence when the poem is read without any reggae rhythm (so to speak) backing, one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm coming out of the poem' (qtd in Brown 51–54).

The development of dub poetry has already been well documented elsewhere, but a few important points should be made. First of all, dub poetry was an offshoot of the radical spirit of the 1970s and answered the need of a community, both in Jamaica and in England, which felt cut off from the academic world and society at large. Dub poets portrayed themselves as the spokespersons of the oppressed or the 'voice of the people' and their poems focused on issues like the colonial legacy, race relations, the difficult living conditions in Jamaica's working-class areas (known as 'ghettoes') and all forms of oppression more generally.

In Jamaica, the dub poet Okuonuora began to write poetry while he was in jail for armed robbery, and his poems became so popular that he was allowed out of jail to perform them at the Tom Redcam library. Eventually, Okuonuora was released on parole in September 1977 and his first collection, *Echo*, was published shortly afterwards (Habekost 20). In 1979 and 1981 respectively, he released two records, *Reflection in Red* and *Wat a Situashan*, on which he performed his poems to the accompaniment of reggae music. These dub poems dealt with the harsh reality of poverty and violence in Kingston's ghettoes and contributed to establishing dub poetry as a genre of protest poetry.

Similar experiments with sound and music had been carried out in England by the Black British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson who was born in Jamaica in 1952 and arrived in England in 1961. Johnson's first collection of poems, *Voices of the Living and the Dead*, was published in 1974. Two collections followed, *Dread*

Beat an' Blood (1975) and *Inglan Is a Bitch* (1980). Johnson also recorded a number of reggae albums with Island Records and Virgin, and these recordings made him very popular with a young, multicultural audience which was probably more interested in reggae than in poetry.

In his poems Johnson dealt with the problems faced by the West Indian and Black British community in Britain and he quickly became the voice of Black Britain. His poems relied heavily on reggae rhythms and frequently featured binary structures and alliteration. He wrote about the living and working conditions of the Black British communities in poems like 'Sonny's Lettah', (*Inglan is a Bitch*), 'Inglan is a Bitch' (*Inglan Is a Bitch*) and 'Five Nights of Bleeding' (*Dread Beat and Blood*), but could also celebrate the power of reggae and its social role in poems like 'Reggae Sounds' (*Dread Beat and Blood*).

In the 1980s the dub poetry tradition was continued by a number of Black British oral poets who began to insist on the concept of the oral tradition and ancestral culture, and who tried to dissociate dub poetry from an over-reliance on reggae rhythm, because it was felt that such a dependence on Jamaican popular music had led to an impasse. The poet Jean Binta Breeze had even stated that she found the dub format too 'restricting': 'I had to get out of the confines of dub poetry... It was so restricting having to write poetry to a one drop reggae rhythm. That can't be good for any poet' (qtd in Habekost, 45). So the new generation of dub poets tried to focus on the concepts of ancestral culture and on the communal aspect of oral art. These poets include Levi Tafari, Martin Glynn, Benjamin Zephaniah, and more recently Moqapi Selassie and Kokumo (Gerald Dixon).

In 1986 Levi Tafari and his friend Eugene Lange founded the 'African Griot Poetry Workshop' and toured local schools and community centres. The first part of the workshop consisted of a presentation on the oral tradition and the role of the griot in Africa. The second part of the workshop consisted of a performance of Tafari's and Lange's poems to illustrate 'the live experience that is the only way to appreciate the "human element" that is so vital to the Griot tradition' (Habekost 78).

In 'De Tongue', Tafari claims that the poet's role is to 'inspire de youths' and to 'project de truth' and that the tongue is 'de first instrument'. Tafari clearly sees the poet as a teacher, an educator and this didactic function of art lies at the heart of the new conception of dub poetry. This view appears clearly in 'De Word':

Wi use de word
 fe express a feelin
 Wi use de word
 fe give life a new meaning
 Wi use de word
 inna de oral style
 Wi use de word
 yes all de while
 [...]
 Wi use de word
 fe fight oppression

Wi use de word
 Fe teach a lesson (Tafari 21).

From a formal point of view this poem is based on the call and response pattern which underpins many Caribbean work-songs and which consists of a short refrain called by the leader and improvised lines sung by the group.

In 'Duboetry', Tafari says that his brand of poetry (called 'duboetry' to distinguish it from 'dub poetry') is to be placed in the context of the Last Poets' 'jazzoetry' thus making clear its long pedigree:

Inna de Sixties
 Wi heard jazzoetry
 From de LAST POETS
 Black revolutionaries
 They chanted for
 Their Liberty (Tafari 24)

The poet also observes that duboetry 'nuh inna dictionary' and that 'its inna different category'. This new poetry belongs to the same tradition as dub poetry but is another branch of the same tree. The new dub poets like Tafari and Zephaniah are aware of a long tradition of black oral poetry and in his poem 'Rapid Rapping' Zephaniah mentions Linton Kwesi Johnson, Martin Glynn, Lioness, Levi Tafari, Mutabaruka, Okuonuora, John Agard and Grace Nichols. The new dub poets often name other poets to insist on the fact their art is to be placed in its proper cultural context and is not to be assessed or judged by standards associated with what they consider as 'traditional' poetry or poetry for the page. So they insist on the oral and revolutionary nature of their art, associated with dub. In 'Rapid Rapping', Zephaniah summarises this characteristic of griot poetry:

Long time agu before the book existed
 Poetry was oral an not playing mystic
 Poetry was something dat people understood
 Poetry was living in every neighbourhood
 Storytelling was compelling listening, an entertaining
 Done without de ego trip an nu special training
 Found in many forms it was de oral tradition
 When governments said quiet, poets said no submission. (Zephaniah 39)

Dub poetry is represented in Birmingham by Moqapi Selassie, a performance poet of Jamaican parentage who was born in England and who has been writing and performing in the UK for many years now. He belongs to the Black British generation, the children of Jamaican immigrants who settled down in the UK in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. In his teens Selassie became attracted to the reggae and Rastafarian subculture which had taken Britain by storm in the 1970s following the success of bands like Bob Marley and the Wailers, Third World, Culture and the Gladiators. In the early 1980s Black Uhuru came on the scene and made a very big impression with songs like 'Abortion', 'Plastic Smile' and 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner'. They quickly became Selassie's favourite band.

Selassie also became a member of the Ethiopian World Federation, a Rastafarian organisation which had been responsible for the repatriation of Rastafarians to Ethiopia. He also joined a sound system called Goodwill International and learnt how to play the akete drum.

Over the years Selassie has established quite a reputation as a dub poet or a performance poet. He is mainly known as a performer but his poetry also works effectively on the printed page. His poetry includes a public, protest or celebratory side which remains quite constant, and a more private side which complements the public side. His poetry is steeped in the Caribbean oral tradition and is characterised by a degree of intertextuality with reggae culture. For instance, the poem entitled 'Respect Due' is a tribute to the late Louise Bennett, aka Miss Lou, the 'godmother' of performance poetry in the Caribbean, and it playfully alludes to several famous reggae songs (including a reference to Sergeant Brown, a figure who appears in Lovindeer's 'What the Police Can Do', a track released in the 1980s) to draw the audience:

Is who mi ah taak bout?
 Mi ah taak bout Miss Lou
 Mi nah taak bout
 Mosquito One
 Mosquito Two
 Is who mi ah taak bout?
 Mi ah taak bout Miss Lou
 Mi nah taak bout
 Sargeant Brown
 Or de one bwoy blue
 Is who mi ah taak bout?
 Mi ah taak bout Miss Lou
 Mi nah taak bout
 Lou lou skip tuh mi lou
 Is who mi ah taak bout?
 Mi ah taak bout Miss Lou
 Mi nah taak bout a stalk ah sensimilla
 By Black Uhuru
 Mi ah taak bout Miss Lou. (Doumerc 2006a 75)

In performance, Selassie chants the verses by himself and is joined by the audience for the 'Miss Lou' chorus ('I'm talking about Miss Lou'). The poem works as a manifesto for oral poetry as it is a tribute to a well-known Caribbean poet who wrote in dialect, but it also embodies the Caribbean oral tradition without relying on the reggae rhythms or social themes which characterised dub poetry in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The same pattern recurs in another poem by Selassie entitled 'Confidence'. Selassie always performs this poem at the beginning of his 'readings': it is his signature poem. 'Confidence' relies on the alternation between verses chanted by the poet and a chorus shouted by the audience:

Confident
 yuh haffè
 confident
 innah
 anyting
 yuh do
 yuh haffè
 ahv
 confidence
 Confident
 yuh haffè
 confident
 innah
 anyting
 yuh do
 yuh haffè
 ahv
 confidence

 If yuh
 doin anyting
 now it nuh
 mek nuh sense
 if innah fe
 yuhself yuh
 nuh ahv nuh
 confidence
 yuh 'ead
 cuddah full up
 ov intelligence
 yuh cuddah
 ahv
 charm
 personality
 an eloquence
 tuh tell yuh
 de troot
 it nuh mek nuh
 difference
 if innah fe
 yuhself
 yuh nuh ahv
 nuh
 confidence

(Doumerc 2006a 69)

An important aspect of Selassie's poetry is its commentary on local or international events, sometimes simply voicing the concerns of his community. This communal aspect of his poetry brings to mind the role of the oral poet or griot in African societies. A griot is a travelling, itinerant musician and poet/storyteller from West Africa or Senegambia. In *Rap Attack*, David Toop quotes an excerpt

from *Savannah Syncopators* in which the art of the griot is summed up: ‘though he has to know many traditional songs without error, he must also have the ability to extemporise on current events, chance incidents and the passing scene. His wit can be devastating and his knowledge of local history formidable’ (Toop 32). In his article entitled ‘Dub Poetry: Selling Out’, Stewart Brown defined the role of the griot in the West African tradition:

Put at its simplest, the central tradition of West African oral poetry was the praise song, a poem of celebration or protest, made by griots whose function within their societies included observing, commenting on and voicing the concerns/conditions of the people. They were licensed, as it were, to make the complaints of the people heard in the courts of power. And whether or not the griots were taken notice of, the fact that the voice of popular discontent was articulated, that there was a mechanism by which it could be heard, diffused a lot of tensions within the society. (Brown 52)

Such is the effect of Selassie’s poem entitled ‘Concrete Jungle’ which takes the listener/reader on a ‘tour’ of Birmingham seen through Black British eyes. The audience/reader is not given the usual tourist-brochure description of Birmingham as a modern success story of the industrial revolution, but an ‘other’ picture:

Rule Britannia
 Britannia rules
 Di waves
 Dem tek InI
 Black people
 Here innah Inlan
 Fi wuk wi as slave
 Again?

Natty Dread
 wi livin
 innah concrete jungle
 Natty Dread
 wi livin
 innah concrete jungle

‘igh rise ghettoes
 houses in di skies
 no one cyan tell I
 dat dis is paradise
 mi get up in di marnin
 wot ah bam bam
 guh fi ketch a lif
 di lif outtah hackshan
 di way dem bill deze
 playsiz
 its like a pris’n

Coz Natty
 Handsworth
 Aston

Ladywood
 Edgbaston
 Kings Heath
 Balsall Heath
 Sparkbrook
 Small Heath
 Evvryweh I man guh
 All I see is concrete
 Cum mek wi step it
 Uppah freeman street

Coz Natty (Selassie, unpublished poem)

An important aspect of this type of poetry is naming, as the poet refers to well-known areas which are inner-city areas and which are a far cry from the popular city-centre haunts and restaurants. The poet appears as a chronicler of the underdog, an 'alternative newscaster' in the Linton Kwesi Johnson or Benjamin Zephaniah mode. This poem is also characterised by some reggae intertextuality as it is reminiscent of the Black British reggae group Aswad's song 'African Children'. In this reggae number Aswad sang about the children of Caribbean immigrants living in some kind of concrete jungle with nowhere to play.

'Concrete Jungle' also works through its reference to a famous Bob Marley tune that depicted a hellish environment and a life without hope, but it also evokes 'Natty Dread' in its evocation of a deprived urban environment. So songs in the heavy roots reggae tradition seem to have provided the template for this poem. Wit is also present as the first stanza includes an ironic reference to the patriotic tune 'Rule Britannia' with its chorus 'Britons never, never shall be slaves'. In the poem, Britons 'tek I and I/Black people/Fi wuk as slave'. 'Concrete Jungle' also brings to mind 'I and I Alone' by the late Mikey Smith, a piece that places the persona in the middle of an urban inferno he does not understand and in which he feels isolated.

Topicality is essential to the art of the dub poet, and Selassie's work reflects this feature of performance poetry. For instance, one of his recent poems, entitled 'Dey Doan Care', takes to task George W. Bush's administration in the wake of the disaster wrought by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The poem presents the persona as an average person sitting in his living room, watching the news on television, and being bombarded with 'harrowing sceenz' involving black people and 'rescue teams'. The poem lays the stress on some incongruities like the fact that 'Bad bwoy Merika' 'cyan 'elp/udder nayshanz/ by any means/but dem cyaan/ save dem ownah/peepul innah New Orleanz'. The American dream is denounced as a polite fiction in the light of the devastation in New Orleans and the poet contrasts 'di policy/fi save an defend/di property' with the apparent lack of respect for 'hewmanity' displayed by the 'Nashanal Guard' and its 'sharpshootahz'. The refrain broadens the scope and makes its point through alliteration and repetition:

Dey doan care

For us at all
 Dey doan c-a-a-a-r-e
 Dey doan care
 For us at all
 Dey don't
 Dey don't (4)

In this poem Selassie's spelling system plays an important part, which means that the poem works on the printed page too. For instance, the American dream is referred to as 'di Americon dream', and the connotations of 'con' in this context cannot be escaped: America is presented as a conman who tricked immigrants and its own people into believing in ideals like life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This interpretation is borne out by some lines about the poor, huddled masses that Emma Lazarus wrote about in the poem engraved at the foot of the Statue of Liberty: 'corporate Amerika/doan give a damn/bout di dispossessed/di poor/downtrodden/and homeless'. The original lines by Emma Lazarus read: 'Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses [...]/Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed to me!'

Another subtlety revealed by a closer reading of the poem concerns the use of (mis)spelling. Indeed it could be argued that Selassie's spelling contributes to a defamiliarising effect which throws a negative light on the events related in the poem:

Now dis is di reality
 Ah natral catastrophe
 Mek it clear
 Fi di ole wide werl fi see
 Amerika's racial parshality
 Why wen di wite peepul
 Took tings
 Dey called dem survivahz
 We, black peepul
 Took tings dey called dem lootahz (4)

In this excerpt the way 'Amerika', 'parshality', 'peepul' and 'lootahz' are spelled, although faithfully transcribing a Jamaican pronunciation, also unsettles the non-Jamaican reader (and maybe the Jamaican reader too) and forces him or her to concentrate on these words in a new way. Selassie's spelling signals a Jamaican voice, but also points out the fact that what is presented in this poem is not the conventional take on 'reality', but a different, alternative perspective.

Nevertheless Selassie's poetry should not be seen as confined to 'protest poetry' or 'slogan poetry' as some of his poems reveal a more personal side. The poem entitled 'My Dad' is a case in point. This piece is autobiographical and belongs to a certain tradition in West Indian poetry which consists in writing about one's ancestors or one's parents and in seeing them as emblematic of a certain way of life. In this poem the figure of the father stands for the immigrant

experience in Britain when thousands of Jamaican people came to the Mother Country in order to rebuild the British economy while improving their material conditions. The poem is made up of series of monometers and dimeters, and deserves to be quoted at length in order for its effect to be grasped:

my dad
 left Jahmaykah
 innah di fifties
 cummah Ingran
 my dad
 in di Baptis church
 im woz a deacon
 my dad
 cum from Jahmaykah
 Gibraltar St Annes
 live ah Birmingham
 innah Ingran
 my dad
 always use tuh seh
 get ah good education,
 yuh 'ear son.
 my dad
 use tuh sing di loudis
 innah church
 my dad (Doumerc 2006a 73)

In the rest of the piece, the reader/audience learns that Moqapi's father loved his 'fry dumpling an oats porridge', liked watching cricket and gardening, planting 'onion, thyme, potato and tomato'. The catalogue of Jamaican characteristics may seem tedious, and may read like a sociological treatise, but in fact the effect produced by the poem's terseness is quite the opposite: the reader feels as if he or she knows many people like this 'dad' and can thereby relate to the feelings displayed in this poem. Anyone can relate to this poem. Interestingly, when asked about the reason which led him to write such a poem, Selassie replied that he had tried to counter all the negative stereotypes associated with the dysfunctional black family in which the father is always absent and the mother has to do everything (Doumerc 2006b).

Selassie's poetry stands as an example of modern dub poetry today in England and its links with the Caribbean oral tradition are quite obvious. His poetry includes a strong protest element but is not confined to that tradition, as it is also celebratory and joyful. Selassie's poetry shares some obvious characteristics with traditional dub poetry, but it is also different from this type of dub poetry inasmuch as it does not rely on rigid reggae rhythms and tries to focus on themes like ancestral culture, the power of the oral tradition or family ties. It is a form of performance poetry which bears the influence of traditional dub poetry but also tries to move forward.

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Olive Senior

PEPPERCORN

Torn from the vine in a place of moist
 heat and shade where I was growing,
 skin once plump and reddish, glowing.
 Suddenly, a job lot. Indiscriminately
 thrown in, we are jumbled, shaken up,
 rolled together, little knowing our fate
 or destination, till black and shrivelled
 by the sun, looking all alike now, we are
 tumbled into hold of a ship for forty days
 and forty nights (we guess — for black
 is the fenestration).

Disgorged, spilled out, shell-shocked
 I come parched and dried, my head
 emptied, till shock-still I come to rest,
 shelled out, buck naked. In the mad
 ensuing scramble, who will come
 who will come sample me,
 view me, choose, me, sort me out
 for grade and quality, drive me home
 to crush me, use me? Know that alone
 I'm of little value, like a peppercorn
 rental. All together, we can pepper
 your arse with shot.

Over time, despite our treatment,
 you'll see, survivors stay pungent
 and hot. You can beat me senseless,
 grind me down, crush me to bits, to
 powder. You can never lose my bite
 on your tongue, my hold on your senses:
 forever I'll linger and cling.

In your mad scramble to possess,
 devour me, remember, if you'd only
 allow me to do a striptease, slow, peel off
 my black skin, you'd be pleased —
 or shocked — to discover: I'm white below.

(from *Shell*, 2007, Insomniac Press, Toronto, pp. 45–46)

ANNALISE FRIEND

African Drumming in Australia: White Men Can't Drum?

INTRODUCTION

This essay asks and attempts to address questions of identity that are raised by the practice of African drumming in Australia. These are as follows: what stereotypes are invoked in the marketing and practice of African drumming events in Australia, and do these stereotypes remain fixed in a context where participants have diverse ethnic heritage, and drum for a variety of reasons? Does the popularity of African drumming in Australia across a wide range of social and ideological groupings point to a desire to trace roots to an ultimate African homeland? Can this popularity also be read as a 're-embedding' response in reaction to the disembedded¹ aspects of a globalised, particularly urban, Australia?

By asking these questions I explore some of the complexities present in the physical act of playing in rhythm, which may appear to be a simple somatic process free from cultural politics, but its contexts — which may range from a corporate boardroom to a 'hippie' full moon beach gathering — suggest that issues of ownership and imitation may still be present. Complexities attach in particular to opposing stereotypes of the primitive, innately rhythmic black male drummer, and the imitative, hapless white man. Even if complicated or inverted, the power of these stereotypes remains, particularly in the marketing of drumming events and in the motivations of many participants.

I explore these questions through reflective means; that is, by describing and analysing some of my experiences as a performer and teacher of drumming, and by introducing and analysing information about who is involved in African drumming in Australia, the drums they play, where they drum, and why. This essay aims to create the beginnings of a bridge between an academic focus on identity politics and the ways that African drumming has been, and is now happening in Australia.

STEREOTYPES EXAMINED

A cliché repeated at drumming events and in their marketing material (which, like all clichés, may hold some truth) is that the somatic, experiential joy of acting in rhythm is innate to all human beings (Drumbeats online; InRhythm online; Slapsista online). This universalist idea has been linked to the fact that many of our internal physical functions are rhythmic, as well as our everyday external movements (Sachs 1953). For those with hearing, rhythm can be heard wherever there is sound, whether it is 'natural' or 'manmade'. It is fair to generalise that

most music is rhythmic most of the time, and that many cultures have a tradition of drumming (Akwaaba online; InRhythm online; Soul Drummer online). More broadly, rhythm can be perceived in, and translated from, ratio, numerical sequences, and visual patterns (Sheehan 2008; Slapsista 2008). Rhythms can be read in clocks or mandalas, in binary code and in fingers tapping an essay on a keyboard.

This broad view of rhythm is often used to explain that ‘everyone has rhythm’, or ‘everyone can drum’; which is not to say that the inclination, ability, or dedication to playing a drum is equal for all participants. Yet the appeal of drumming is often precisely that it feels universal, like an activity that cuts across cultural difference through a unifying heartbeat. Yet simultaneously issues of ownership and inclusion are thrown up by the very act of playing African drums, and possibly rhythms, in places such as Australia, a context very different to their origin.

While the unifying nature of rhythm is a powerful part of the rhetoric around African drumming in Australia, at the same time, the promise of ethnic difference, or particularly the stereotype of a primitive, sexual, raw African rhythmicity is a key part of the success of the events. African drumming is undoubtedly the most popular form of hand drumming: perhaps worldwide, and definitely in Australia (InRhythm online; Pitcher online). This suggests that the stereotype of African drumming is a primal, visceral experience in contrast to much of the lives of many Westerners, and that the experience of otherness is desirable and saleable. African drumming enjoys high status in the hierarchy of both ‘world’ and ‘percussive’ music, due to marketing and the migration of key drum ‘masters’, recording artists and teachers, particularly to France and the United States from the 1950s and 60s (Charry online).

The stereotype that black people, particularly Africans, are innately, more authentically rhythmic is widespread. Like many stereotypes, opposition is at work: the exotic ‘blackness’ of drumming is invoked in opposition to another stereotype of ‘whiteness’, that being the association of whiteness with a disconnectedness from bodily experience. Or, put simply, that white men can’t drum. This may further explain the appeal of African drumming for many white participants:



White men drumming.
(Photo: Alejandro Rolandi)

the Africans have something that they do not possess and that they want. Yet a paradox is present: can a supposedly ‘innate’, ethnic rhythmicity be learnt?

The stereotype of a white drummer in Australia is often that of a dreadlocked hippie, convinced he is channelling the drumming essence of Africa though generally only producing an embarrassing, woeful imitation: embarrassing for whites and woefully incapable from the perspective of

Africans. So while the underlying idea that ‘we all have rhythm’ is key to the popularity and rhetoric of drumming events, oppositional stereotypes are also present that reveal the tension between trying to erase cultural difference and the idea that rhythm is an ethnic inheritance.

These stereotypical black and white drummers are both male figures. Yet they are not just imaginary stereotypes: the African drummer of world music recordings and performances in Australia is overwhelmingly male. In fact, I personally have not seen or heard a female drummer of African origins on recordings or performances in Australia that I am aware of — although I have in documentary footage shot in Africa.² *Djembefola*³ in Africa have traditionally been male, but the Amazonas Women Master Drummers of Guinea are a new, radical exception to this, (see World Music Productions 2008).

The spectacle of an African drummer is linked to the clichés of black masculinity and sexual force being stronger than that of white men — which may be why the imagined figure of a white man who cannot drum invokes embarrassment: it is an emasculating sight. Phallic competition can be read in the ways that jembes are played, particularly in high-energy performance mode, strapped to the drummer and hanging between their legs. The fear that white men cannot (or should not) drum like Africans may point to an awareness of the theft of ‘others’ music and colonialism. Yet the situation is more complex than the one-way appropriation of blackness by white drummers: African drumming teachers and performers in Australia are literally in the business of selling their blackness, and their drumming, as a service or spectacle. A Guinean *djembefola* in traditional costume and with an oiled, black skinned body who performs a loud, fast solo to open a team building session in a corporate boardroom can be read as ‘adding value’ to the drumming ‘package’ being sold.

The competition between the African and non-African male drummers may explain why there is less participation by women as teachers, performers and facilitators of drumming in Australia.⁴ Some white male drummers may exclude women from drumming events, or especially compete with them if they feel that they have to prove something. If white men fear they may be emasculated, then the presence of skilled female drummers is likely to be perceived as an additional threat. This may explain why it takes especially confident, brave, or patient women to enter the domain of professional drumming: they are not even acknowledged in the stereotypes of the drummer and are very often played over in events. It also partly explains why some women choose to participate in women’s-only events and performance groups (see Hill 2008a online).

By reflecting on my own experience at drumming events over twelve years at many festivals, in Byron Bay, Sydney and Wollongong, the idea that rhythm is innately African which ‘white’ drummers cannot match does not bear out. While there are skilled African drummers in Australia, the marketing hype that accompanies them does not always match their proficiency, or in drumming

jargon, their ‘chops’. The idea that African men are innately better drummers does not necessarily mean that they are skilled, flexible or humble teachers (to my mind).⁵ Indeed, the ‘best’⁶ drumming performance and teaching that I have experienced in Australia was not performed by Africans, although this is not necessarily reflected in the hype around many African performers and teachers.

Another contradictory aspect of rhetoric around drumming events is the lure of an imaginary African homeland for all humans (which, from my understanding, is still a debated proposition in biological and anthropological science). Participating in an African drumming event as a teacher, student, or performer may for some be a part of the search for human ‘roots’ in the face of what is in some ways a disembedded, globalised world.

The international spread of African drumming is a visible instance of ‘contemporary accelerated globalisation’ yet it may be that the hegemonic aspects of globalisation are catalysts for many participants to turn to drumming (Eriksen 92). The desire to be involved in an activity that is tactile and exotic and thus sets one apart from consuming mass-produced entertainment may in part be a reaction to the passive aspects of ‘cultural’ experiences accessed through television, mp3 players, the internet and gaming. In addition, African drumming in Australia is an interesting example of identification with a distant place and culture that, being directly experiential, might be understood as a bodily enactment of deterritorialised connection. This connection is imagined as spanning time as well as space, which is heard in the idea that through drumming participants are ‘going back’ to an earlier, simpler time.

As well as identifying with a far off African evolutionary birthplace, some African drumming events could be viewed paradoxically as an attempt to ‘re-embed’ participants’ sense of local habitation in Australia. This can be heard in the rhetoric that ‘this drum circle is what “we do”’ at, for example, North Bondi

beach. It has been suggested that the ‘disembedded’ nature of much of contemporary urban life produces the reaction of ‘re-embedding’ oneself in local activities, and identifying with a local place (Eriksen 152). Disembedding may provoke for drumming participants an attraction towards the concrete (hands pounding on a goatskin), interpersonal communication (between drummers), and a local, physical occurrence.



Up for the Downstroke, 2003.
Tim Orgias, Beau Bruderlin, Annalise Friend, Saul Smith.
(Photo: Alejandro Rolandi)



Detail of an Australian-assembled dundun.
(Photo: Alejandro Rolandi)

Dreaming of travel to an exotic locale is explicitly linked to participating in African drumming locally, as reflected in the world music label Roots CD's slogan, 'music from the road less travelled'; or the Sydney based drumming business InRhythm being profiled as a part of a Travel feature, suggesting participants can experience something 'of Africa' locally (Pitcher online; Roots World online). (Here the experiencing of the 'other' is conveniently packaged at a local WEA course.) The axis of other-self is seemingly collapsed — the exotic can be experienced at home — yet nevertheless kept intact; the otherness of the activity is literally its selling point.

THE 'AFRICAN' DRUM

Although there are many drums, styles, and rhythms that come from Africa (not to mention dances, songs, stories and chants that may be performed alongside the drumming) the most common drumming style in Australia comes from West Africa. The most common drum is the goblet shaped jembe (or djembe — although this French spelling invokes colonialism and is therefore rejected by some), which is traditionally made with a goatskin head and wooden shell (Charry online). The jembe is said to have originated from Mali and Guinea, yet is

found in all of West Africa, where it is one of the most common instruments. There is general agreement that the origin of the djembe is associated with a class of Mandinka/Susu blacksmiths known as Numu. The wide dispersion of the djembe drums throughout West Africa may be due to Numu migrations dating from the first millennium A.D. (Meinl Percussion online)

Jembes may be handmade or commercially manufactured, with those from a factory sometimes having plastic heads and/or fibreglass shells. Jembes are ideally played together with the onomatopoeically named dun dun bass drums (djun djun or dundunba);⁷ bells such as cowbells and agogo; and shakers such as chekere or shekere (a gourd covered with a woven mesh punctuated by seeds or beads).

Several sources indicate that jembe is the most popular hand drum in the world (Hill 2008b online; Meinl Percussion online). This is explained by the fact that it is relatively portable, inexpensive, and that it is easy to play some basic tones and rhythmic parts on it, a point made in the marketing by drumming manufacturers, teachers and performers (see, for example, InRhythm online; Soul Drummer online). However, there may be other non-pragmatic reasons for its popularity. Many drumming participants/consumers desire to own something 'authentic',

‘traditionally African’, and possibly ‘hand-crafted’, and the jembe is marketed as such (although some wooden shells in Australia are imported from Indonesia, not West Africa). The tactile immediacy of a hand drum made of wood and skin also appeals to many people who spend much of their time in cars, on computers, and walking on concrete.

On the one hand, the jembe is said by some to connote a community gathering as its loud high tone is used to call villages together. This aspect is often marketed as a way of bringing communities, musicians, children, or a team of workers together (InRhythm online; Rhythm Effect online; Soul Drummer online). On the other hand, the jembe may be played as a loud solo instrument, so its popularity may be due to a player’s sense of individualism: everyone wants to be heard above the group. It is true from my experience at Australian classes, retreats, performances and jams that most people (particularly before experiencing facilitation or teaching) have an approach to playing that is more self-focused than about listening to the overall group sound. This is particularly true of *chai tents*⁸ at folk festivals, one of the contexts where I first experienced drumming on African drums.

When properly tuned, the jembe has a very loud, machine-gun like report which makes some solos on the instrument sound like gunfire. This sound (and the accompanying ‘African’ style of playing with rapid-fire high and sharp slaps) may have developed as a way of playing ‘breaks’ and ‘calls’ — both for directing the dancers and to communicate across distance — to be heard without amplification. The intensity of this style of playing also expresses emotion and invokes trance-like states in the players or listeners. However this style, which is often accompanied with a smile tightly held, almost like a grimace by the African performer, at times seems incongruous with the generally ‘laidback’, ‘Australian’ atmosphere, particularly if it is performed by a white-skinned drummer. This is not to say that it is necessarily as simple as ‘white’ people ‘not being allowed’ to learn and perform this style; but rather that it can sound and can look noticeably ‘African’ and therefore draw attention to the performer’s ethnicity. It is also an obvious way of displaying fast rolls and tricks but in the Australian context, which is haunted by the ‘tall poppy syndrome’, this hints at the different cultural expectations of musical performance.

DRUMMING EVENTS AND PERFORMANCE

There are several types of drumming events: educational (which encompasses drop-in classes, workshops, courses, and private lessons, at schools, music and community institutions, or hosted independently by the teacher); performance (for corporate events, world music festivals and venues, schools, parties, weddings, and street busking); ‘community events’ such as drum circles, often held on the full moon, particularly at beaches, and the aforementioned *chai tents*; for therapeutic purposes such as ‘health and wellness’ drum circles provided for special needs clients, the elderly, small children, people with a mental illness, and at health



their unexamined 'urge to wildness' (see Connell 2005); and as a part of self-development or social welfare programs in prisons, detention centres, youth centres, community, migrant and health centres. Finally, drumming events may take the form of corporate team building events (conference presentations, rhythm-based team challenges, and ice-breakers); professional development sessions for teachers and drum circle 'facilitator trainings'; and as 'interest courses', offered alongside yoga, craft, cooking, computer programs at community colleges.⁹

I have been involved in most of these types of events. Pursuing drumming has led from my jamming in the Fire Dancing Club at the University of Wollongong in 1997, with very little knowledge of the drums or rhythms; to being a facilitator of corporate team building sessions at lush conference centre boardrooms; to teaching elite private school girls, and teenage boys in a juvenile detention centre. At times the sheer range of contexts is disorientating, which again speaks to the appeal of drumming and the surge in the industry in the last decade. Most of the estimated fifty drumming businesses that provide performance, teaching and facilitation at these events in Australia are under ten years old. The ideological groupings and justification for the occurrence of these events can range from a, 'New Age', blurrily 'multi-ethnic' desire to 'become one under the full moon', to a very structured team building objective that likens drums to communication tools within a work place, and learning and performing drumming to performing the 'strategic aims' of a corporation.

Events promoted as African drumming usually involve African drums, but do not always involve teaching African rhythms. For example, the rhythms used for a team building session may not have derived from an African cultural tradition. Many bands, ensembles, orchestras, and choirs use African drums (again, particularly jembe) in genres ranging from contemporary classical to funk, afrobeat, hip hop, rock, 'roots', and hybrid world music. While many drumming professionals are honest about the

expos. There are a variety of contexts where drumming is a part of spiritual practice or personal development: drum and/or dance retreats, seasonal gatherings, and private rituals; at specifically 'women's drumming' or 'Goddess' workshops and retreats; at men's groups and retreats, where both the drumming and the groups have received harsh commentary for



distinctions between traditional, contemporary, and improvised rhythms, there is potential for misrepresentation and deception that a rhythm is 'traditional', or that a teacher or performer is a 'master drummer' (Dennis online).

A statement signed by African drummers generally agreed to be jembe 'masters' and published online in global drumming forums asks for tradition to be kept intact and respected in the midst of the jembe's international popularity:

All the rhythms have names, a history transmitted from generation to generation, and it is necessary to know them... The djembe is not reserved only for tradition. It is a popular instrument that can harmonise with all other instruments. It is open to all. There are performances and then there is the tradition. One must not confuse them. They are completely different. (Konate online)

Yet even when attempting to distinguish between 'performances' and 'tradition', how could this be policed? Particularly worldwide? Audience and participants in African drumming events often presume that an African drummer is representing a tradition, but this assumption may actually help to create the conditions for a re-authoring of what is 'traditional'.

The participants in African drumming events are diverse — from lesbian, feminist activists to school children; from a wide variety of workers attending a conference to prisoners and youth 'at risk' of dropping out of school. In my experience participation by women has increased in Australian drum circles, classes, workshops and courses. However the 'lead drummers' of these gatherings — those who graduate to a small ensemble or team that may teach, facilitate corporate events, and perform — are overwhelmingly male. Women are the exception. However, African dancing participants are overwhelmingly female. This suggests that participation in Australia is connected to social norms, such as women generally being more comfortable with dancing in public, and men generally being more comfortable with (or feeling more entitled to) playing a loud drum in public. Of course, this is not a one-way process: the teachers and performers and promoters of these events contribute to these trends.

MOTIVATION

From my experience, motivating factors for those participating in African drumming events include: stress release; to experience trance; to make some noise; to express aggression; to learn about rhythm; to learn about — and perhaps respect — another culture; to connect with (and perhaps heal) the earth; to connect with a 'community'; because their friend was going; they wanted to 'pick up'; for social interaction; to express their inner femininity/masculinity (and God or Goddess); to be the best; to add to their repertoire as a percussionist or drum kit player; because it's the team building activity at the conference that year; or that ambiguous Australian phrase, 'it's something different'. Some people may be aware of African drumming traditions, and the possible complexities of them learning African drumming in Australia. For others, the 'personal development' motivations are primary.



For many participants a key motivation is a desire for real, somatic invigoration, as described by one of the key drummers to bring African drumming to the West, Babatunde Olatunji: ‘The sound of the drum resonates an inner chord that vibrates through your whole body, so that when you go through the

act of drumming you are energising every cell in your body’ (Soul Drummer online). This ‘energised’ state, or the ‘drummer’s high’ may be witnessed even in those watching drumming: for example, whenever there is a drum kit solo in a performance, the audience often lets loose their most enthusiastic cheering at the immediate suggestion of unadulterated drumming. In the case of participating in a drum circle, the mutual immersion in rhythmic sound and action may indeed create a feeling of closeness with a range of people. Drummers may ‘talk’ to each other on their drums, without a language barrier. Learning a rhythm together in a class can be like learning a physical language that can bring relief to the anxieties of urban living. At the same time, the pathways that brought African drumming to Australia and the ways it has become an industry, have political implications and can be contentious.

Some non-African drumming teachers/performers/facilitators skirt the racial stereotypes invoked in drumming and instead build their style and ‘image’ around ingenuity, originality and musical themes. A prominent example is Greg Sheehan, a formidably creative percussionist, and teacher of mine. He has devised and taught innovative approaches to rhythm that use, amongst other sources, sequences of numbers and geometric patterns. He is aware of a wide range of world rhythm cultures and practices, yet may arguably be propagating a genuine Australian drumming style due to his unofficial mentorship of many musicians (Sheehan 2008). Other musicians may also draw on and respond to a range of contemporary and world music in their percussion: they could also be said to be developing a ‘glocal’ style (see Aurora Percussion online; Loucataris 2008a online; The Rhythm Hunters online).

CONCLUSION

African drumming events in Australia both draw on and stir up the idea that rhythm is universal. Yet the commercial and ‘community building’ enterprise of African drumming in Australia also trades in stereotypes, particularly masculine blackness and whiteness, which contradicts the desire for connection across cultural and ethnic boundaries. The diverse range of contexts in which African drums and/or rhythms may be played in Australia, and by whom, speaks of a wide

variety of motivating factors and levels of knowledge about African rhythmic 'tradition'. There is potential for misrepresentation of what is traditional and what is 'contemporary'. Yet the popularity of the jembe means that completely policing who plays what is unrealistic. So too, is knowing the truth of whether ultimately, 'everyone has rhythm'. It is certainly true from my experience that drumming can be an invigorating, unique way to communicate to others without the need for speaking. Drumming is a visceral experience that is unusual in a somewhat disembedded, globalised Australia, and an activity that calls into question the complex consequences of globalising processes.

NOTES

- ¹ Disembeddedness is understood by Erikson as a general 'movement from the concrete to the abstract, from the interpersonal to the institutional and from the local to the global' (Eriksen 280).
- ² Ubaka Hill should be mentioned. An African-American drumming teacher and performer who visits Australia, she is firmly focused on 'women's drumming' and women-only events.
- ³ Literally translated *djembefola* is 'one who gives the djembe voice'. It is the traditional Malinke name for a djembe player (Djembefola online).
- ⁴ Janine Rew is a notable exception (Afrobeat online).
- ⁵ It has been pointed out to me that some of these teachers may have undergone intense training regimes in African national ballets, and in any case their experiences of teaching and learning may differ widely from my expectations (Loucataris, M. 2008b, personal communication).
- ⁶ My subjective criterion for 'best' includes: unique 'feel', proficiency, musicality, listening, and composing or improvising agility.
- ⁷ A full set of *dun dun* consists of three barrel-shaped drums of different sizes: the smallest and highest is the *kenkeni*, the next biggest is the *sangan* and the bass drum is the *doundounba*. They may also collectively be called *dun dun* (or it seems, in Australia at least, as *dun duns*). A bell is often attached to them, to be played with one stick, the drum with the other.
- ⁸ Chai tents are named after the spiced Indian tea and are synonymous with 'hippies' and all night, all day drumming.
- ⁹ In practice many of the event types overlap. For example workshops may include rhetoric about community building; many of the same people may attend many different events; and moments of more obvious 'performance' may arise at a non-performance event.

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Melancholy and The Magpie: Coetzee's Amoro-Dolorous Duo

If I had cared to listen in on a warm spring night, I am sure I would have heard him crooning his love song up the lift shaft. Him and the magpie. Mr Melancholy and Mr Magpie, the amoro-dolorous duo.

(Coetzee 2007 176)

Many years ago as a young intern in St Ann psychiatric hospital I saw a patient who had descended into a profound melancholy. He was a caricature of depression, like an image of melancholia from Esquirol's atlas (1838); his face was turned away and his body, refusing to inhabit its frame, was held in place only by the chair. He said nothing for many weeks, and then one day he responded to a question with a slurry of words: 'Why struggle when one is already defeated? Why speak when one can say nothing of all this?' In these words, weighted with futility, the melancholic experience is distilled. Melancholy shuts the mouth: when it descends even breath finds it difficult to clamber from a body willing itself into the grave. It is the gap on the page marking the time when words have failed, 'when there is nothing to say of all this'.

Yet, if melancholy paralyses speech it also, paradoxically, galvanises it. As Burton writes in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*: 'I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy' (20). Burton's anatomy translates melancholic paralysis into a language that is florid, angry, energetic, ludicrous and brilliant:

I was not a little offended with this malady, shall I say my mistress Melancholy, my Egeria, or my *malus genius* (evil genius)? and for that cause, as he that is stung with a scorpion, I would expel clavum clavo (a nail with a nail), comfort one sorrow with another, idleness with idleness, *ut ex vipera theriacum* (as an antidote out of a serpent's venom), make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease. (21)

This capacity of melancholy to manifest in antithetical forms means that melancholy can never be read simply as the sign of itself. Historically, it manifests within a dialectic of twinned opposites: paralysis and mania; excess and order; marginality and chauvinism; verbal collapse and logorrhoea; retreatism and utopia. From the Greeks to the Romantics, melancholia is both an illness of lethargy and paralysis, and the forge of creative energy and brilliance. For Burton in the seventeenth century, melancholy's inhibition of action, introspection, and social withdrawal, is at the same time the springboard for his Utopia. As the

German sociologist, Wolf Lepenies points out, Saturn is both ‘Lord of Utopia and the sign of melancholy’ (Lepenies 11). In Freud’s re-conceptualisation of melancholia in the twentieth century the unconscious cause of melancholia is the antithesis of its visible manifestation. Melancholic despair for a lost love-object camouflages the ambivalent hatred the ego bears towards an incorporated other (Freud 247–68). In all these divergent understandings of the term, and across its long history, melancholia is never simply reducible to its representative content, either physically or textually. If one hears only melancholia’s base note — its gloom, fear and despair — then one misses the way melancholia plays parallel notes as if playing two instruments at once. Just as a songbird can use both the left and right sides of the syrinx to produce a two-voiced song (Kaplan 86), melancholy produces two seemingly independent and contrary songs that issue from the same source.

In his most recent novel, *Diary of a Bad Year*, J.M Coetzee attempts to bring this melancholic dialectic into view by its visible enactment in a novel that opens like a songbird singing a two-voiced song. From the first page of *Diary of a Bad Year*, the narrator’s voice is split into two: the disembodied and disaffected voice of an essayist, and the voice of a diarist, embodied, affective, and riven with desires and despair. These two voices sound at the same time, in a text that one can read vertically or horizontally, but however one proceeds the reader must re-conjugate a parsed form.

Above the bar that divides the page, Juan is an essayist whom the reader encounters only as the didactic voice of critique. Short of neither breath nor words, his essays target every contradiction, moral failing, imbecility, illegality and perfidy of the Western world. In the first set of essays the reader is introduced to the melancholic state of modern political culture articulated as a set of paradoxes. We are born into a state, the essayist argues, created to protect us from the violence of others, but we have no right to decline this protection because if we do, we are outlaws reduced to the status of animals. The state protects its citizens through subjection, and democracy guarantees the freedom of choice by repressing the possibility of not choosing its choices — hence democracy is totalitarian. There are essays on democracy; bureaucracy; power; nationalism; globalisation; the war on terror; terrorism; the destruction of the university; the decline of honour; the policing of desire; the failure of Art to influence politics (People in power ‘could not care less what ballet audiences think of them’ [33]); the abjection of the Australian government in its service to the coalition of the willing; governmental contempt for the rule of law; the likelihood that humans will lose the battle against viruses; Australian detention centres; the apology as Act; the decline of sincerity; the myopia of rationality; the blind-spot in the theory of evolution; and the oxymoron of a humane slaughterhouse.

While some critics have been careful not to conflate the opinions of the essayist with the novelist, many critics have read the essays on face-value, as

if they are a direct expression of the political and philosophical meditations of J.M. Coetzee. For some critics there is no distinction between the writer and the character. Richard Eder, for example, writes: 'His views are undoubtedly the author's, reflecting fierce ideals estranged from a contemporary relativism' (1). Some critics have debated the content of the essays, as if an effective response to the novel requires an intellectual engagement with the essayist's 'strong opinions'. Peter Brooks, for example, criticises the essayist's 'bitter condemnation' of contemporary literature departments as if the literary character and the author are synonymous (B5). Others have seen the essays as a source of insight into the intimate experience of the novelist in his post-apartheid life in Australia. As one critic writes, they create a 'compelling even loveable portrait of a chilly and curmudgeonly ageing writer' (Massud 3).

James Wood warns against such simple equations of author and character, pointing out sharply that the essayist's opinions 'have a slightly overinhabited quality, as if too many other people had been squatting in their public rooms' (142). Indeed, it's the very familiarity of the ideas contained in these essays and the ease with which the arguments are identified and assimilated that should alert the reader to the performance and repetition of a semantic field rather than a direct engagement with the supple, sinuous and enigmatic thought of J.M. Coetzee. As Wood writes; 'a passage "On Terrorism", sounds like a bull with a bullhorn, and is very different in tone from the more feline Coetzee, who would surely rather have his claws pulled than commit to print the phrase "It's déjà vu all over again"' (143).

The essayist is a literary character whose most pronounced characteristic is his split subjectivity. Far from representing another subject — the author — he represents a particular kind of disembodied, critical, rational and philosophical thought. Robert Spencer recognises this in an article, 'J.M. Coetzee and Colonial Violence', in which he reads the novel as predominantly concerned with Coetzee's long standing themes of guilt and ethical responsibility. Citing D.G Myer's study of holocaust victims — 'Confronted with the accusation of another's suffering, the "I" is put in question' (175) — he argues that *Diary of a Bad Year* induces this experience in the reader through the essayist coming to realise that his cantankerous and pedantic opinions lead only to despair and solitude. For Spencer, the 'I' put in question is the authoritative 'I' of the essayist faced with his own failure to translate opinion into concrete ethical acts (175). In Spencer's reading, the novel continues Coetzee's longstanding preoccupation with relations between domination, dehumanisation and moral and ethical responsibility. I would suggest however, that in this novel Coetzee refocuses his attention from the failures of community, which may be conceptualised following Sam Durrant, as Coetzee's 'dogged insistence on the time of mourning' (445), to a focus on melancholy as the pathology not simply of modernity but of the form of its thought. In *Diary of a Bad Year* the 'I' that is put in the question is the 'I' of critique, of liberal

rational thought, and most pointedly of moral humanism. To suggest this, is not to imply a diminishment of the ethical imperatives sustained throughout Coetzee's oeuvre, but rather to attempt to follow the ethical challenge of this particular novel generated in the melancholic doldrums of Howard Australia; a political context very different from apartheid South Africa.

The essays, or rather their content, are not the critical matter of the text. To focus on the essays' content alone is to miss both the form of the novel — its split voice — and its tone. Derek Attridge has written eloquently on the relationship between Coetzee's formal singularity and the ethico-political significance of his oeuvre, arguing that Coetzee's formal innovations are irreducible to both utilitarian intentions and post-modernist play. Formal innovation in Coetzee's writing, he suggests, involves innovations in meaning and it is at this level that Coetzee makes his strongest ethical demand on the reader (11). Perhaps then, it is worth pondering the relationship between the split form of the novel, its affective tonality, and its innovation in meaning *qua* ethics.

Coetzee has often given fictional form to the view that reason is, as Elizabeth Costello argues, 'Only "the being of one tendency in human thought"' (McInturff 5). To see the action of the novel, as Woods suggests, as occurring primarily at the top of the page and in the essay's elaboration of ideas (145), is to miss those other tendencies and affects that resound below and across the bar. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, the essays can be read as a metonym both of the disembodiment of their author, and of rational thought itself.

Throughout the novel, melancholy awareness resounds — of the immateriality of reason in an epoch where intellectual thought is without social force. Behind the essayist's volley of critique one can detect an echo of Burton castigating the world for its idleness, sloth and corruption — but there is a significant difference. In Burton's *Anatomy*, melancholic disgust at the world transforms into the poetic inspiration that leads him to invent a self enclosed work; a Utopia:

It were to be wished we had some such visitor ... he should be as strong as ten thousand men ... he might ... alter affections, cure all manner of diseases ... end all our idle controversies, cut off our tumultuous desires, inordinate lusts, root out atheism, impiety, heresy, schism and superstition, which now so crucify the world, catechise gross ignorance ... I will yet, to satisfy and please myself, make a Utopia of mine own, a New Atlantis, a poetical commonwealth of mine own, in which I will freely domineer, build cities, make laws, statutes, as I list myself. (96–97)

The distinctive form of melancholia for intellectuals at the turn of the twenty-first century however, lies in the inability to transform melancholic disgust into utopian fantasy. The blind alley of Utopia cannot be taken — even in fantasy — in a century that has witnessed Utopia's disgrace. Coetzee's anatomist has no recourse to fantasies of social engineering of any political form. Unable to take recourse in Utopia, his essays return again and again to the question of how can honour be reclaimed given that agency itself has been annihilated. His is a melancholy that redoubles on itself without exit, disgust further inflamed by impotence.

The essayist could be characterised as an everyman of the post-Enlightenment tradition, enraged by his impotence in a world that refuses to mirror his reason. Identifying every contradictory logic at large in the world, he berates and castigates the world — as if the world could be perfected with the word — while at the same time analysing and elaborating the impossibility of the word to act in the world. In a world of dismantled universities, disempowered intellectuals, dishonest governments, and a rapacious capitalism, the essayist is conscious of his powerlessness and predicates his analysis on this powerlessness but continues, nevertheless, to speak relentlessly in the voice of reason.

If melancholy is conceived as residing not in its representative content but in its tonality, in its flattening of affect (Kristeva 43), then in these essays it is in the stripped down voice of reason — a voice that registers no body, affect, or symbolic play — that carries the melancholic lode. While the essays are elegant in their logic, and have the unclouded perspicacity associated with melancholy since Aristotle; and while they identify the metaphoric spark of poetry as operating like terrorism, outside the law, — cunning, ungrounded and more mobile than the state — they are completely without symbolic play. To read them, is to encounter not only the Western malaise, but the malaise of the Western intellectual who has nothing left but his reason. With neither agency nor poetry, his is a flattened and disembodied language in which reason holds the world to account for its failure to be reasonable. But who is listening? And who, for that matter, is speaking?

A crumpled old fellow, the reader discovers, when reading below the bar that divides the page. If the bar registers as an echo of Saussure's algorithm that divided language into signifier and signified, then the text is structured around a joke; for the referent for the essayist's endless chain of signifiers is not the corrupt and dishonoured world of men, but the melancholy of an old man's thwarted desire. Below the bar Juan's diary begins with desire — an old man's impossible desire for a woman with a perfect 'derriere'.

My first glimpse of her was in the laundry room. It was mid-morning on a quiet spring day and I was sitting, watching the washing go around, when this quite startling young woman walked in. Startling because the last thing I was expecting was such an apparition; also because the tomato-red shift she wore was so startling in its brevity. (3)

He attempts to engage the young woman in 'pleasantries', but sitting crumpled in the corner he could be mistaken for a tramp, and it is only neighbourliness and its code of courtesy that holds her to his banter. He knows that she knows that between them there is not simply gallantry but something more personal, 'something to do with age and regret and the tears of things' (7), and it is not his desire that she wants to avoid, but his melancholy, his old man's impossible regret for everything lost to him as he edges closer and closer to death. This regretful old man is the essayist and the essays are his 'opportunity to take magical revenge on the world for declining to conform to [his] fantasies' (22). They form part of a collection entitled 'Strong Opinions', in which six eminent writers pronounce their opinion on what is wrong with the world.

Here we are, six *éminences grises* who have clawed our way up to the highest peak, and now that we have reached the summit what do we find? We find that we are too old and too infirm to enjoy the proper fruits of our triumph. Is this all? we say to ourselves, surveying the world of delights we cannot have. Was it worth all that sweat? (22)

Through the device of the split page, Coetzee re-institutes melancholy as the counterpoint of rational discourse. Above the bar the essayist lays bare the world in its irrationality and immorality, a world in which the subject is stranded without moral compass, in which good camouflages evil, and in which nature inevitably dwarfs the rational intentions of men, just as men destroy nature. This is a voice and vision of deep — albeit unconscious — melancholy — a voice individuated and isolated by modernity, writing out of melancholy, but unable even to voice its own loneliness, fear, and loss of being. Above the bar reasoned critique, below the bar the detritus of the aging body, and the ‘tears of things’. Above the bar, a voice interrogating the failure of the world to uphold law and honour; below the bar, an old man sharpening his cunning to lay siege to the girl.

If melancholy is the defining mood of modernity (Ferguson), then Coetzee is giving it back its body, the thinker’s head returned into the hands that have cupped the melancholic’s brow since antiquity. In this sense, *Diary of a Bad Year* is asking the reader to ponder the being of the Western intellectual, to refocus attention from cause to condition. If modernity’s bird’s-eye view of the world — a view uncluttered by religious consolation, unsupported by mechanical solidarity, and unregulated by tradition and taboo — delivers the modern thinker into a melancholic condition that cannot even recognise itself, might there be another way to be an intelligent subject in the modern world? Might there be another way of embodying reason and thereby melancholy differently? For if ‘the tears of things’ are excluded from the essayist’s rational/moral discourse, so too is his aggression. In splitting the page, Coetzee focuses attention on the way moral and political discourse proceeds as if it issues from a subject uncompromised by animal spirits.

Enter Anya, the girl from the Laundromat whose bottom wiggles before the old man’s besotted eye:

I turn my back and off I go with a waggle of the bum, his eyes avid upon me. I picked it up from the ducks, I think: a shake of the tail so quick it is almost a shiver. Quick-Quack. Why should we be too high and mighty to learn from the ducks? (27–28)

Cajoled by Juan to become his typist, the page splits once more and Anya’s voice enters the text warbling and chirruping in duet with the melancholic’s two-voiced song.

When I am not carrying laundry baskets I am his segretaria, part-time. Also, now and again, his house help. At first I was just supposed to be his segretaria, his secret aria, his scary fairy, in fact not even that, just his typist, his tipitista, his clackadackia. He dictates great thoughts into his machine, then hands over the tapes to me, plus a sheaf of papers in his half blind scrawl, with the difficult words written out in careful block letters. I take away the tapes and listen to them on my earphones and solemnly type them out. Fix them

up here and there where I can, where they lack a certain something, a certain oomph, though he is supposed to be the big writer and I just the little Filipina. (25–26)

If the essayist views the world from a disembodied bird's-eye vantage point, Anya views him with the sharp-eyed focus of a bird scrutinising its patch. Her eye goes straight to the worm: 'Cockroach heaven. No wonder his teeth are so bad. Crunch-crunch. scribble-scribble talk talk. Down with the Liberals. What Hobbes said. What Machiavelli said. Ho Hum' (40).

She is every writer's nightmare. He says 'papists and Popery', she types 'papers and papery'. He says the 'Urals', she types 'the urinal'. She can neither type nor spell, is as narcissistic as a spoilt child, and her typist's credentials derive from her past employment in a cattery. Debased by the times, epitomising the world he rails against — a world of pragmatism, consumerism, amorality and narcissism — she is the detritus of a romantic heroine in late modernity. She spends her life shopping, augmenting her boyfriend's status by augmenting his commodity — her body. Yet she waggles her bottom and the writer is transfixed. If his strong opinions performed the symbolic demand that the world acts ethically, under the bar this demand is haunted by the melancholic object; the man himself who hunts the woman as object. She is not Anya but 'derrière'. There is a sorry truth on view here: a melancholic truth Burton recognised when he wrote, 'Men will cease to be fools only when they cease to be men. So long as they wag their beards they will play the knaves and fools' (97), and the girl waggles her bottom, and the old man wags his beard, while the essays continue above the line pontificating about the knavery and foolishness at large in the world.

It is out of this encounter in all its foolishness, that Coetzee gestures towards a way forward for his melancholic intellectual. Unlike the essayist who disdains and distances himself from an imperfect world, Juan's desire holds him to the imperfect Anya, and subjects him to her gaze and the intolerable truth that she finds his prating as tedious as he finds her prattle. It is only through the encounter with her and her insistent preference for his embodied being in lieu of symbolic representation that he is slowly returned to the tears of things and hence, to himself:

Write about cricket, I suggest. Write your memoirs. Anything but politics. The kind of writing you do doesn't work with politics. Politics is about shouting other people down and getting your own way, not about logic. Write about the world around you. Write about the birds. There are always mobs of magpies strutting around the park as if they own it, he could write about them. Shoo, you monsters! I say, but of course they pay no heed. No brow, the skull running straight into the beak, no space for a brain. (31)

Just as the essayist is doubled by his body, Juan is doubled by Anya — the Western intellectual tradition and its nemesis, mass culture. Coetzee holds them in dialogue; the old man desperate to be desired by the young woman, the young woman in need of something the old man has that she does not know she lacks. While Burton fantasised Utopia as the antidote to his melancholy Coetzee

limits himself to the diminished fantasy of a *volte-face*. What might the modern melancholic intellectual learn, the novel ponders, if the writer spoke with an ear to his audience? Could Juan learn something from the bird-woman? What does she know that he does not know and what might they learn from each other if he learnt to sing and she learnt to talk? For, while Anya has no language, in the sense that she is outside the discourse of Western knowledge, she has what he lacks: song — the intuitive embodied song of the birds. While she has no knowledge as such, she knows what his knowledge forecloses: that humans are territorial and that territories of the self will not be dissolved by discourse. It is this mutual need born out of the destitution of their respective positions that enables the essayist to recognise the empty cadences of his own prating. At the critical turning point in the novel, Juan recognises sorrow as the foundation of his thought:

Perhaps what I feel descending on me when I am confronted with images, recorded with zoom lenses from far away, of men in orange suits, shackled and hooded, shuffling about like zombies behind the barbed wire of Guantanamo Bay, is not really the dishonour, the disgrace of being alive in these times, but something else, something punier and more manageable, some overload or underload of amines in the cortex that could loosely be entitled depression or even more loosely gloom and could be dispelled in a manner of minutes by the right cocktail of chemicals X, Y and Z. (111–12)

This is a revelatory moment which fuses the split voices of the text, and after which the essayist/diarist begins anew, writing a second sequence of essays — his ‘soft opinions’ — which gather up the body of the man, his desires, dreams, imperfections and vulnerabilities. This new voice is not the voice of a man who has turned his back on the Western intellectual tradition, nor is it the voice of a man who has been cured of his melancholy, but his voice is now weighted with his embodied being.

While not paralysed by melancholy, his voice carries the trace of its affect. His point of view is no longer held aloft from self and other, but views the world from an embodied circumference. A brief essay, ‘On Ageing’, reads:

My hip gave such pain today that I could not walk and could barely sit. Inexorably, day by day the physical mechanism deteriorates. As for the mental apparatus, I am continually on the qui vive for broken cogs, blown fuses, hoping against hope that it will outlast its corporeal host. All old folk become Cartesians. (147)

But if Juan has managed to inhabit his melancholy and so find a dwelling place for being within the body of the word, Anya returns his melancholic vision of the world to him, as it were, from the real. For lurking behind Anya is *Homo-Economicus*, her boy-friend Alan, the territorial and predatory investment consultant who confirms the melancholic’s vision of the lawless immorality of the modern world.

Alan is a boundary rider, policing his territorial rights over Anya. With his magpie-brain tuned to territorial incursion he recognises Juan instantly as a threat. Using Anya’s typing files he penetrates Juan’s computer gaining knowledge of

the financial details of the old man's millions. He plans to steal Juan's money but Anya will not have any part of it. When it comes to the crunch, she recognises territorial acquisition as law-bound, and Alan, whose anomic territorialism knows no law, ends up losing her. She has been changed by her encounter with Juan and while his two voices have fused on the page, her voice now splits into a two-voiced song. As she makes preparations for Juan's death, Anya — the feminine anagram of Juan — has a new bottom line.

A number of critics have commented on the musical structure of the novel. Jeff Simons suggests that the novel can be read contrapuntally as you might listen to one of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. Neel Mukherjee argues that Coetzee's use of counterpoint translates the capacity of the ear in music to hear two things simultaneously — to the practice of fiction. Yet no critic, to my knowledge, has connected the musical structure of the novel — its simultaneous sounding of three voices — with its exploration firstly of melancholy as the counterpoint of enlightenment reason and secondly, with the magpie.

Diary of a Bad Year is not, as one critic suggests, 'a dazzling celebration of what binds us' (Craven, 20), nor is it a new kind of writing from the 'Aussie Coetzee' who has imbibed the playfulness of 'other great literary eccentrics from Down Under' (Upchurch online). It is a deep meditation on how critical and cultural thought can embody its melancholy in an age when intellectual thought is disenfranchised, and where the moral projects of intellectuals have driven vast numbers of people into oppression. Coetzee moved from South Africa to Australia at a time when indigenous Australians were once again being driven off History's page, and when the Australian intelligentsia were being pacified and silenced. These were bad years when the low-browed magpie appeared victorious, and yet, it is to the magpie that Coetzee turns to chart a trajectory through the ethical impasses facing the contemporary artists and intellectuals of Australia and the world. The magpie — an iconic Australian bird of domination and territoriality — flits through these pages as a meta-trope of the novel's musical form, its themes, and its forward flight. If this, the most recent of Coetzee's 'Australian' novels, expresses his new locale, it is less in its explicit Australian content (the essayist's debate with the Howard government) than in this meditation on the magpie as a trope for the writer's search for a voice.

Magpies are boundary riders defending territories of the self with a punitive will that John Howard might have approved of. Pecking and slashing at asylum seekers in the 2005 election Howard could have been a Magpie Chief, mimicking the war cries of his Magpie Madam, Pauline Hanson. Her boundary song: 'if I can invite whom I want into my home then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country' (Hanson). His war cry: 'We will decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come' (Howard).

Magpies have survived colonisation remarkably well. As fringe-dwellers and ground-foragers they have profited from its clearings and have been largely

invulnerable to its predators. Even dogs are chary of them given the way a flock will remember and relentlessly punish any act of predation. Territorial and hierarchical, they lend themselves all too readily to anthropomorphic interpretation. In the early days of colonisation the dominant magpie became a central and parodic motif of incarceration. Dressed in the piebald suits known as 'Magpie suits', convicts parodied the magpies' fearless visibility in a humiliating costume that ensured their visibility in the bush. For colonial writer Marcus Clarke, the magpies' frenzied song was a melancholy synonym for a colony unable to speak itself into existence. Clarke conceived of the Australian landscape as a melancholic maniac, in turn sullen, withdrawn, grotesque, and hysterical — scribbling dementedly like a creative genius at the height of a hypomania (Rutherford). He could not find in it a home for the writer, and the magpie's song redoubled this homelessness, parodying the thwarted voices of his fellow 'poets of desolation': 'That bird,' he wrote, 'is typical of everything Australian. There is something in him but it can't get out' (Phillips 24).

But as the ornithologist Gisela Kaplan's extraordinary study of magpies suggests, magpies are irreducible to their deployment as synonyms for territorial aggression. In fact, territorial acquisition is beyond most magpies and they could as readily serve as synonyms for diaspora and homelessness, as territoriality. Many magpies never acquire territory, they are migratory birds, travelling from one feeding ground to the next, never able to secure ground or settle. Some are marginal: like stateless refugees they exist with neither territory nor flock but stand 'facing trees for hours, beaks often pointing at the bark or touching the tree and adopting crouching postures without feeding or drinking' (Kaplan 34). If they turn and face the feeding grounds of established magpies they are subjected to brutal pecking until they return to their subservient posture. Birds who do manage to establish territories, gain dominance in their flock, and breed, live highly stressful lives fighting off territorial encroachments and policing every incursion into their space.

Yet, for all their territorial aggression, magpies are birds of high etiquette and eloquence, their musicality provides the means for negotiating territory without war. Kaplan documents how magpies sing their territories, boundary riding through song. In disputes over territory, flocks stand parallel to a territorial border and contest propriety through the eloquence of their carolling. Every object in a magpie's territory is sung and the male magpie only swoops at the unsung trespasser who fails to heed their eloquent warning (120). Judith Wright recognised this duality in the magpie's behaviour when she contrasted the magpie's clashing beak and greedy eyes with the grace and joy of their song: 'Their greed is brief; their joy is long./ For each is born with such a throat/ as thanks his God with every note' (Wright 340).

It is this split nature of the magpie that Coetzee draws on to provide a meta-trope for *Diary of a Bad Year*. When Juan follows Anya's advice and writes about

the magpies that inhabit the park opposite, he sees in them a sign of his own masculinity, fighting to defend a territory:

the magpie in chief (that is how I think of him), the oldest — at least the stateliest and most battered looking. He, (that is how I think of him, male to the core) walks in slow circles around me where I sit. He is not inspecting me. He is not curious about me. He is warning me, warning me off. He is also looking for my vulnerable point, in case he needs to attack, in case it comes down to that.... (163)

Juan sees Alan in the magpie, a boundary rider looking for a weak spot in a potential adversary, but Anya recognises the magpie as the old man's bedfellow. Melancholy and the magpie, a two-voiced song which the old man is finally learning to sing:

If I had cared to listen to him on a warm spring night, I am sure I would have heard him crooning his love song up the lift shaft. Him and the magpie. Mr Melancholy and Mr Magpie, the amoroso-dolorous duo. (176)

In 'Writers on the Wing', Lucile Desblache suggests that magpies in *Diary of a Bad Year* figure as creatures of enclosure and entrapment, mirroring the controlled spaces of human inhabitation. Coetzee's birds, she writes 'do not sing, they are dark and constrained', and when the magpie does sing his song it is a war cry (Desblache 178–91). Desblache focuses on the negative meaning of the magpie which, she rightly argues, hovers over the novel, but the magpie in this novel is also both a master and symbol of counterpoint. The novel ends as the old man defends his territory, as magpies do, carolling out a war cry. Simultaneously, he elects Bach as his father, and sings a song of praise for the rhetoricity of Dostoevsky, of whom he writes:

far more powerful than the substance of his argument, which is not strong, are the accents of anguish, the personal anguish of a soul unable to bear the horrors of this world. It is the voice of Ivan, as realised by Dostoevsky, not his reasoning that sweeps me along. (176)

This is not a novel that attempts to resolve or cure melancholy, nor to deny the veracity of the modern melancholic's vision, but rather to deliver melancholy back into the word — to recollect it as a mode of expression and to regather sorrow in the body of the voice. It is a work about the voice, about the way the voice can either elide its melancholic trace, and so lead us by reason into a paralysis, or can sing its song. If there is a movement in the novel it is a movement forward into death. Its question: how can one embody death and sing its song from within the territories of the self? How might the word change, how might thought change if one moves from the bird's-eye view of the melancholic critic of modernity back into a body weighted with its stupidities, aggressions and imperfections. Another way of posing this question is to ask how might thought change if the fools recognised their knaves within? If melancholy met its magpie?

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Olive Senior

YARD FOWL

Rooster

As long as a Rooster somewhere
is angry enough to claw at
the sun blood red rising and
pull it through, day will come:
the world will go on.

(from *over the roofs of the world*, 2005, Insomniac Press, Toronto, p. 22)

ADEL RIDDEN

‘And none can silence this song’: A Retrospective Essay for Olive Senior

Olive Senior is irrepressible. Not having met her, perhaps what I mean is her song is irrepressible, but then her song is her spirit — ‘the soul’s shining’: ‘so excuse me for interjecting an ode here’ to Olive.¹ She is the shell of which she writes in her most recent volume of poetry — the vessel through which the voices of her personal and communal history speak; and she is the sea that informs the shell and carries the voices to shores far distant from their place of origin. Olive’s poetry travels well because it carries her story lightly. Even though that story is often one of darkness, it is also a story that lets in the light — a little at a time so as not to blind us, a little at a time so as not to cause us to turn away. Let me give you an example from *Gardening in the Tropics*:

Gardening in the Tropics, you never know
what you’ll turn up. Quite often, bones.
In some places they say when volcanoes
erupt, they spew out dense and monumental
as stones the skulls of *desaparecidos*
— the disappeared ones. Mine is only
a kitchen garden so I unearth just
occasional skeletons.

(‘Brief Lives’ 1994 83)

Senior’s poetry unearths the skeletons in her own back yard, but that yard expands and contracts to reveal the degree to which the intimate histories of family and local community in the Caribbean islands are entangled with the (global) history of the Americas, Africa, Europe, the world ... the planet. This sense of the little in the big and the big in the little is evident even in the titles of Senior’s poetry collections that begin with *Talking of Trees* (1985) and the politics of trees, to *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) and the politics of gardens, to *over the roofs of the world* (2005) and the politics of birds, to *Shell* (2007) and the politics of eggs (!) — the houses (wombs) out of which we are born, and the houses in which we dwell. Like the spiral of *gastropoda*, the movement of Senior’s poetry is inward to the smallest point of beginning and outward to the largest expanse of universe; and always the poet belies the cunning of her art with a fluidity of literary shape-shifting and a simplicity of poetic language:

You think I’ve stayed home all my life,
moving at snail’s pace, sneakily living off
another’s labour? You think I’ve nought
to leave behind but empty shell? Come:

study me. Take my chambered shell apart.
 Brace yourself for whirlwinds
 coiled at my heart.

(‘Gastropoda’ 2007 9)

Senior writes with the craft of Anansi — the spiderman/god of the Afro-Caribbean story-telling tradition that informs so much of her work. In ‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’ she makes connection between Neruda’s directive to grasp poetry ‘like a thread’:

*You must spin it
 fly a thread
 and climb it*

*This isn’t a matter
 for deliberation
 it’s an order²*

and the thread of Anansi story:

Here’s how I see it. This thread is one that crosses your path
 like the spider’s web. You walk through unaware
 The Great Spider still clings to it. So now Spider clings
 to you, my friend. This is not an accident. You have been
 chosen Spider’s apprentice. To master language. As
 Trickster, to spin and weave tales. To prophesy and heal.
 The go-between serving earth and sky. Sometimes the
 messenger left dangling.

(‘Ode to Pablo Neruda’ 2005 94)

The sticky web of Anansi stories clung to the Africans enslaved and transported to the Americas to be retold in new variation, adapted to new conditions. The history of slavery is not only a story of human and cultural devastation but also a story of survival. The poet’s role in this context is to ‘master language’, much like the slaves mastered the conqueror’s language to use it with cunning against him in work-song and calypso. The new culture that grew out of what Kamau Brathwaite has termed ‘creolisation’³ is a syncretic culture in which old traditions are grafted onto new. This is not of course an equal coming together, as much of the old culture that came from Africa was ‘vanished’ like the *desaparecidos*; but the trace of thread remains in the yard games of children:

That world no longer exists.
 Yet from the architecture of longing
 you continue to construct a bountiful edifice.

This is not exile.
 You can return any day to the place that you came from
 though the place you left has shifted a heartbeat.

Like the artful dove Hopping Dick
 you hopscotch.

(‘Blue Foot Traveller’, V of ‘Wild Nester’ 2005 72)

Senior's poetry skilfully hopscotches from children's skipping song and playground chant to a 'Misreading of Wallace Stevens', from Amerindian myth to Walt Whitman,⁴ from a transported penny reel⁵ to kite flying with Pablo Neruda. 'I needed, Neruda,' writes Senior, 'this kite-string to jerk me back to the/source of creation, to that mantra of obligation':

A chain-link of miles strung out across oceans
a creole spider-work of many hands.

The beads telling not decades but centuries.

...

Here's a bead
for the spirit necklace
of that other lineage.
The ones bound in chains
dragged across the Atlantic
in vessels, full-rigged.
Their vocal chords ripped
with their names
on the tips of their tongues.
Washed away in salt water
The cartography of home.

Survivors of these crossings transplanted shoots, planted
their children's navel cords to become
the roots and the vines for my string.

(*'Ode to Pablo Neruda'* 2005 98)

The 'black' history of enforced transportation and violent transplantation, of people and cultures broken and dispersed, requires the determined effort of the story-teller to imagine a world whole again — the beads restrung on a new thread that must be twisted with the remnants of the old to make it spirit-strong. This is both theme and practice of Senior's poetic oeuvre. 'I reach but a finger across the universe./ Distance is only space-time and we/ exist in the continuum' writes Senior, in her first volume of poetry. To her Arawak Grandmother she stretches a hand:

Understanding
reaches to shake hands across history books
blood kinship may well be a fairy tale
heredity myths mere lies, Yokahuna as real
as the Virgin Mary, Coyaba as close as Heaven.

My spirit ancestors are those
I choose to worship and that
includes an I that existed
long before me.

(*'To My Arawak Grandmother'* 1985 11)

‘I choose you’, my Arawak grandmother, the poet declares. Senior’s poetry reclaims a matriarchal inheritance that is at once personal, historical, mythological and literary, and intimately associated with woman’s tongue, that is with gossip. This is exemplified, with characteristic wit, in the poem ‘Amazon Women’ (*Gardening in the Tropics*). Here the poet interrupts her story of the Amazon women (a story that ‘is true’ because her auntie says so) to ejaculate:

... But
 you see my trial! I’m here gossiping
 about things I never meant to air
 for nobody could say I’m into
 scandal. I wanted to tell of noble women
 like Nanny the Maroon queen mother
 or the fair Anacaona, Taino
 chieftainess ...
 ... I hadn’t meant
 to tell tale or repeat exotic
 story for that’s not my style.
 But we all have to make a living
 And there’s no gain in telling stories
 About ordinary men and women.
 (‘Amazon Women’ 1994 96–97)

Here then the orature of Anansi story converges with Amerindian mythology, women’s gossip and the professional poet of the new/old global economy who ‘has to make a living’. The exotic sells. But however street-wise, and however willing (always with a sense of self-irony) to tailor her ‘product’ to market demand, Senior’s poetry never forgets its obligation to recover the silenced voices, and never allows the reader to forget the politics of Caribbean story (even when talking of trees).⁶ When the poet chooses her Arawak Grandmother, she chooses her

for affirmations pulsing still
 In spite of blood shed or infused.
 Baptismal certificates are mute
 While the whisper of a clay fragment
 Moves me to attempt this connection

Her latest collection of poetry is a kind of literary archaeological dig in which Senior attempts to make sense, make meaning, from the fragments of the past. Each poem of the collection, *Shell*, is a fragment, a found object like a shell, that speaks to the future:

So if in years to come some people
 might be mad enough to search for us,
 to trace our passing, they would have
 to dig deep to find us here, sift ashes,
 measure bones and beads and shell discarded.
 (‘Shell’ 2007 70)

The whisper of a clay fragment in Senior's earliest volume attracts other whispers until whisper becomes shout and human breath takes on the force of a hurricane — a whirlwind coiled at the heart of her most recent volume of poetry. 'Flesh is sweet but disposable', observes the voice of the shell: 'what counts/ is shell', for this shell contains 'everybody's/ history: *areito*, *canot histórico*, a full/ genealogy of this beach, this island people':

You could be blown away by what is held
custody here, every whorl a book of life,
a text, a motion picture, a recording,

or what passes for such in our island
version. You could begin anywhere.
Encoded in are full facilities for fast forward,

play, playback and dub, reversible though
not scrubbable. For we — as you know —
are master engineers when it comes to

scratching out a living on vinyl, on dutty
or plantation. We is Ginnal at the Controls!
Nansi Nation.

(*'Shell Blow'* 2007 33–34)

There s/he is again, that Anansi spider wo/man, spinning the thread of song and story through every whorl and every chamber of the poet's heart, 'and none can silence this song that s/he sings'. (*'The Song that it Sings'* 2007 29)

NOTES

- ¹ Quotation is from 'The Song That it Sings', published in Senior's latest collection, *Shell* (28–29) and reprinted on p. 191 of this issue.
- ² Neruda's verse is quoted in italics in Senior's poem, 'Ode to Pablo Neruda', *over the roofs of the world*, p. 92. (These lines are taken from 'Ode to Thread', *Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda*, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden [Berkeley: U of California P, 1990, p. 65]).
- ³ See discussion of creolisation in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1971.
- ⁴ 'over the roofs of the world' are words quoted from Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself' (stanza 52), published in *Leaves of Grass* (1855).
- ⁵ The title of a section (3) and a poem (80–82) in *over the roofs of the world*.
- ⁶ The title *Talking of Trees* is a riposte to Bertolt Brecht's question: 'What kind of period is it when to talk of trees is almost a crime because it implies silence about so many horrors'. For Senior, to talk of trees is to break that silence — to speak the crime — because the history of slavery in the Caribbean is not only the history of human transportation and decimation (the Africans being transported to replace the nearly extinguished indigenous population) but the history of trans/plantation (native trees being decimated in order to plant the introduced plantation crops, also uprooted from their native soil). Senior quotes Brecht on p. 45.

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Olive Senior

THE SONG THAT IT SINGS

so far from the sea I find myself
worldless. (Oh, leave it alone, but I meant
to write 'wordless'.) And sometimes, like

tonight, I feel a hemispheric sadness: the
New World as tired as the rest. And there's
a waterlogged moon getting ready to burst

like the gourd that spilled an ocean when
the seeker, like myself, disobeyed, took it
down from where it hung by a thread,

dropped and broke it. So how were we
to know that from it seas would stream
forth, bringing three ships with our eclipse:

the Black Sun? Yet how but by disobedience
can we change the world order? So what if
all we are left with is a sieve to carry water?

We can use it to fish up a poem or two
to sail from our flagpoles. Or plant vines
to swim seeking radiate air, colonizing

the light to store it for rebirth: a summer
virgin in lace-mantle
of silver.

So excuse me for interjecting an ode here
to silver: to my vine of such magical growth,
and to moonlight, to starlight, to fish-scales,

to sighs, to sadness and whispers, to the pure light,
to water, to ripples over stone, to veils, to jewels
and cutlery, to tinsel, to glitter, to winners' cups

and chalices, to the lining of clouds, to watch cases,
to the instruments before steel, to erasures,
to anniversaries, to the snail's trail, to mother-

of-pearl, to musical notes that are liquid. To our
Earth seen from space, to the light of the fireflies,
to ice, to crystal — petrification of light,

to reflections of mirrors — the soul's shining.

To luminescence of eels, dust particles,
electricity. To anguish and the colour

of forgetting. To needles and pinpricks,
to the pure heart, the clear conscience,
the firm voice. To the keening that is never ending.

For the ocean is endless, the sea has no corners,
no turnings, no doors. And none can silence this song
that it sings.

(from *Shell*, 2007, Insomniac Press, Toronto, pp. 28–29)

ABSTRACTS

ANNE COLLETT

‘Pink Icing and the Sticky Question of Popular Culture’

Taking Mordecai’s recent collection of short stories, *Pink Icing* (2006), as a case study, this essay examines how the local and global are played out in the literary life of the author, in the short stories themselves, and in the publication and distribution of the book. Concomitantly, the essay addresses the question of popular culture: in what way this collection might be seen to constitute such, and how its location in a ‘local’ or ‘global’ context might affect a determination of popular or literary, familiar or exotic.

ERIC DOUMERC

‘Moqapi Selassie: Dub Poetry in Birmingham’

Performance poetry today in England is an offshoot of dub poetry and developed in England in the 1980s thanks to the work of poets like Levi Tafari and Benjamin Zephaniah. These poets tried to revitalise the dub poetry art form after it reached an impasse in the mid-1980s due to its over-reliance on a limited number of themes and aesthetic choices. The dub poets of the 1970s had worked in the protest mode, which in itself was associated with reggae music, to produce a type of poetry that had dealt mainly with social themes like poverty, life in Jamaica’s ghettos and violence. By the early 1980s some performance poets tried to move away from such themes by concentrating on the importance of ancestral culture and by trying to avoid relying on reggae rhythms and social themes which had become something of a convention by the 1980s. In Birmingham dub poetry is associated with Moqapi Selassie, a performer who has been active for more than twenty years now. Selassie is a modern-day dub poet inasmuch as his poetry is communal, celebrates ancestral culture and is marked by a strong protest element, but it is also characterised by a more private side that repays close study. His poetry also works on the printed page and is quite subtle, using a specific spelling to force the reader to focus on certain key words. Moqapi Selassie’s is at the crossroads of dub poetry and performance poetry and is thus a form of modern oral poetry.

ANNALISE FRIEND

‘African Drumming in Australia: White Men Can’t Drum?’

This essay addresses questions of identity that are raised by the practice of African drumming in Australia. These are as follows: what stereotypes are invoked in the marketing and practice of African drumming events in Australia, and do these stereotypes remain fixed in a context where participants have diverse ethnic heritage, and drum for a variety of reasons? Does the popularity of African drumming in Australia across a wide range of social and ideological groupings point to a desire to trace roots to an ultimate African homeland? Can this popularity also be read as a ‘re-embedding’ response in reaction to the disembedded aspects of a globalised, particularly urban, Australia? By asking these questions I explore some of the

complexities present in the physical act of playing in rhythm, which may appear to be a simple somatic process free from cultural politics, but its contexts suggest that issues of ownership and imitation may still be present. Complexities attach in particular to opposing stereotypes of the primitive, innately rhythmic black male drummer, and the imitative, hapless white man. Even if complicated or inverted, the power of these stereotypes remains, particularly in the marketing of drumming events and in the motivations of many participants.

MICHAEL MCMILLAN

‘The “West Indian” Front Room: Reflections on a Diasporic Phenomenon’

The front room is a phenomenon that resonates throughout the African Caribbean Diaspora and the cultural appropriation of the Victorian parlour as created by the European colonial elite in the Caribbean. This is the room in the home reserved for guests and therefore, as a public space in the private domain, it reflects through its aesthetics the moral values, religious devotion and consumer desires of its creators. This essay will explore through visual images of *The ‘West Indian’ Front Room* installation/exhibition curated by me (Geffrye Museum 2005–06), how Caribbean migrant women in the UK invested in material culture in the home to reinvent themselves as black women and ‘good’ mothers. The narrative of the front room’s creation shows that objects such as artificial flowers, ‘The Last Supper’, crochet, plastic-covered sofas, carpets with floral patterns, and Jim Reeves, have layered meanings that are generated and shaped by identity, gender, generation, migration and diaspora. As an aspirational space, where family photographs and tokens of achievement adorn the walls, it also reflects middle class values in the Caribbean and working class respectability in the wider diaspora. The legacy of the front room is symbolised through the 2nd and 3rd generation’s negotiation of tradition and modernity in the context of hybrid identities.

RACHAEL MORDECAI

“‘The same bucky-massa business’”: Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the One Love Peace Concert’

This article analyses Peter Tosh’s performance at the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, Jamaica, in April 1978. It positions Tosh’s famously subversive performance on that occasion within the broader contestation over the nature of Jamaican identity that characterised the decade of the 1970s, arguing that Tosh enacts a construction of Jamaican-ness predicated upon: blackness as the fundamental basis of belonging, awareness and action; the combination of righteousness and defiance; and a long historical view of the experience of black people in diaspora. Combining these elements throughout a series of songs and speeches, Tosh moves beyond a simple gesture of defiance towards Jamaica’s political establishment, offering instead a radically redemptive vision of black Jamaicans as resistant, interconnected, powerful, and the agents of their own liberation.

EMMANUEL OBIECHINA

‘Market Literature in Nigeria’

This essay outlines the rise and fall of a pamphlet literature that developed in Onitsha, Nigeria immediately after WWII. It examines the context, content and form of ‘Market Literature’: a popular literature written ‘by Nigerians for Nigerians’. Its main objectives were a combination of the educational and the entertaining — to reform morals and manners, to give advice on all manner of individual, family and social ‘questions’, and to provide a forum for the appraisal of historical and contemporary politics and political leaders. This was a literature that actively engaged writers and readers (many of whom had little formal education) in the creation of, and adjustment to, a rapidly modernising African culture and society.

STEPHEN DERWENT PARTINGTON

‘Underneath the Umbrella of Hope: Syncretism as Solution in the Dialogic Poetry of Mukoma wa Ngugi’

For many years — arguably since the 1960s/70s *Songs* of the Ugandan poet, Okot p’Bitek — the Anglophone poetry of the East African region has suffered the same misfortune as the genre internationally: a comparative lack of critical and theoretical attention in relation to, say, the novel. This essay focuses on ‘Underneath the Umbrella of War’, a representative poem from the debut collection of Kenya’s young Mukoma wa Ngugi, son of the novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o. The essay argues that Mukoma is an example of what I have termed the Janus Poet, a literary producer who writes from the position of Salman Rushdie’s ‘transplanted man’ — one who lives and writes from and for ostensibly different cultures. It is proposed that his unique situation, in-between cultures, enables him to write a genuinely international poem that offers the reader the chance to actively participate in the creation of meaning, identifying the new imperial (economic) causes of global warfare and participating in the possibility of peace. Written from the USA by a Kenyan, this poem challenges both the isolationist Western reader to responsibly look outwards to the world and the Kenyan reader at home to consider how her/his condition of subjugation is affected. At the same time, it frees certain disenfranchised sections of the American citizenry from the blanket anti-Americanism that is at times suffered by the population of an entire country. A hopeful and liberating poem, ‘Underneath the Umbrella of War’ gives a glimpse of that literary and leftist political freshness that is evident in much of post-Moi government Kenya’s New Generation writing.

JENNIFER RUTHERFORD

‘Melancholy and The Magpie: Coetzee’s Amoro-Dolorous Duo’

In *Diary of a Bad Year*, ‘the tears of things’ are excluded from the essayist’s rational/ moral discourse but so too is his aggression. In splitting the page, Coetzee focuses attention on the way moral and political discourse proceeds as if it issues from a subject uncompromised by animal spirits. Focusing on the magpie, as the metatope of the novel, I read *Diary of a Bad Year* as a meditation on melancholy.

The novel questions how critical and cultural thought can embody its melancholy in an age when intellectual thought is disenfranchised, and where the moral projects of intellectuals have driven vast numbers of people into oppression. I suggest that Coetzee is asking the reader to ponder the being of the Western intellectual, to refocus attention from cause to condition. If modernity's bird's eye view of the world — a view uncluttered by religious consolation, unsupported by mechanical solidarity, and unregulated by tradition and taboo — delivers the modern thinker into a melancholic condition, might there be another way of embodying reason and thereby melancholy differently?

KARINA SMITH

‘Resisting the “Cancer of Silence”: The Formation of Sistren’s “Feminist Democracy”’

This essay examines Sistren’s formation of a ‘feminist democracy’ in the 1980s to resist the negative forces of globalisation. The essay argues that Sistren found itself in the contradictory position of protesting against the impact of late global capitalism at the same time as its work was co-opted by development agencies whose agendas follow capitalist scripts. By looking at Sistren’s community outreach work, collective organisational structure, and transnational feminist alliances, this essay will assess the extent to which Sistren’s work fits with the concept of ‘feminist democracy’ and at the same time complicates and contests it.

ROBERTO STRONGMAN

‘The Afro-Diasporic Body in Haitian Vodou and the Transcending of Gendered Cartesian Corporeality’

This essay advances the notion of transcorporeality as the distinct Afro-Diasporic cultural representation of the human psyche as multiple, removable and external to a body that functions as its receptacle. This unique view of the body, preserved in its most evident form in African religious traditions on both sides of the Atlantic, allows the re-gendering of the bodies of initiates. The culture of Haitian Vodou provides powerful examples of these cross-gender identifications through the phenomenon of trance possession, mystic marriages and zombification. I propose particular interpretations of filmic and literary texts in order to explain how the distinct Afro-Diasporic notions of corporeality of Haitian Vodou produce local categories same-sex desire for practitioners of this religion. René Depestre’s *Hadrianna dans tous mes rêves* is a novel in which the female protagonist becomes identified with a male Vodou deity, or Lwa, during Carnival. Frankétienne’s *Adjanoumelezo* utilises spiralist literary techniques to reveal the potential for gendered ambivalence in Vodou. Documentary film-makers Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire foreground the role of queer male Vodou initiates in the worship of the female deity Erzulie Dantor in their celebrated film *Des Hommes et Dieux*.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ANNE COLLETT teaches in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. She has published widely on 20th century postcolonial women's writing, with particular focus on poetry and a comparative interest in visual arts. Essays on Australian authors Kate Llewellyn, Judith Wright and Beverley Farmer will be published in 2009. Currently Anne is writing (with Dorothy Jones) a comparative study of the representation of indigeneity and land in the work of Australian poet, Judith Wright and Canadian painter, Emily Carr.

ERIC DOUMERC teaches English at the university of Toulouse-Le Mirail in Toulouse, southwest France. His main research interests are the Caribbean oral tradition and its relationship with Caribbean poetry. Over the years Eric has published a number of articles in *Ariel*, *Kunapipi* and the *Journal of West Indian Literature*, a textbook for French university students — *Caribbean Civilisation: the English-Speaking Caribbean since Independence* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), and in 2007 he co-authored a poetry textbook with Wendy Harding entitled *An Introduction to Poetry in English* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail).

Performer, teacher, and student of rhythm, movement and writing, ANNALISE FRIEND is a doctoral candidate in the School of English Literature, Philosophy and Languages at the University of Wollongong. Her PhD topic is identity performance by contemporary hip-hop artists outside the USA. She is more broadly interested in theorising about contemporary cultural practice, particularly through the lens of her personal experience, and investigating 'gaps' between academic discussion and current events.

MICHAEL MCMILLAN is a writer, playwright, and curator/artist of Vincentian parentage. Recent plays produced include: *Blood for Britain* (BBC Radio 4 Drama, 2001), *Babel Junction* (Maya Productions, 2006), and *Master Juba* (Theatre Is & GLYPT, 2006). Books include: *The Black Boy Pub & Other Stories* (Wycombe District Council, 1997) and *Same Difference* (Daneford Trust, 2006). His exhibition, *The 'West Indian' Front Room* (Geffrye Museum 2005–06), had over 35,000 visitors and inspired the BBC4 documentary, *Tales from the Front Room. Van Huis Uit: The Living Room of Migrants in The Netherlands* (see www.thefrontroom.org). His recent exhibition, *The Beauty Shop* (198 Contemporary Arts & Learning), ran from January to March 2008). Michael is currently Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at the LCC (University of the Arts, London).

Born of Malawian parents in Harare Zimbabwe, SAMIR RAITI MTAMBA has published poetry in South African, American and Irish journals. He has taught in Zimbabwean high schools for a number of years and is now a Co-ordinator and Lecturer in the Applied Linguistics and Literature Programme at Zimbabwe Open University. Interests include Media Studies, Cultural Studies and Post Modernist

approaches to Literature. He is working on novels of J.M. Coetzee and the concept of 'the other' in Zimbabwean life and lore.

PAMELA MORDECAI is a trained language arts teacher. Her PhD is on the poetry of Walcott and Brathwaite. Her first prose work, *Pink Icing: Stories*, appeared in 2006 to excellent reviews. She has published four collections of poetry, *Journey Poem*; *De Man, a Performance Poem*; *Certifiable*; and *The True Blue of Islands* and, with her husband Martin, a reference work, *Culture and Customs of Jamaica*. She has written five books for children as well as numerous language arts textbooks. *Writing Home*, yet to be published, is her first novel (see <http://www.pamelamordecai.com>). She blogs at <http://jahworld-pmordecai.blogspot.com>.

RACHEL MORDECAI received her doctorate from the University of Minnesota, and teaches in the English Department of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her primary areas of teaching and research interest are Caribbean and multicultural American literature. Beyond these, her research interests include African diaspora culture; history, memory and narrative; autobiography and *testimonio*; and ethnography in literature. She is currently at work on a book about the role of expressive culture in negotiating and recording the political crisis of the 1970s in Jamaica.

Educated at University College, Ibadan and University of Cambridge where he obtained his doctoral degree in English, EMMANUEL OBIECHINA retired as professor of English from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1990. Subsequently, he has held senior visiting appointments at institutions in the United States: at Ferrum College; University of Pittsburgh at Bradford; University of Kansas at Lawrence; and Harvard University. Emmanuel's publications include *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*; *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*; and *Africa Shall Survive* [essays].

STEPHEN DERWENT PARTINGTON has published a critically acclaimed Kenyan poetry collection, *SMS & Face to Face* (Phoenix, 2003), with another to follow soon. His articles and reviews have appeared in a number of journals, and he contributes frequently to Kenyan literary debates in the national press. He completed postgraduate studies at York and Oxford.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN is Associate Professor at Roskilde University, Denmark. Her area of research and teaching is postcolonial literature, with an emphasis on African literature and women's contributions. Her most recent publication is, together with Mai Palmberg, 'Whose Biafra? An Analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*' (forthcoming).

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